Critique of Economic Reason

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(Material Word)

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À Dorine

Introduction

What we are experiencing is not the crisis of modernity. We are experiencing the need to modernize the presuppositions upon which modernity is based. The current crisis is not the crisis of Reason but that of the (increasingly apparent) irrational motives of rationalization as it has been pursued thus far.

The current crisis is not an indication that the process of modernization has reached an impasse and that we shall have to retrace our steps. It is rather an indication of the need for modernity *itself to be modernized*, to be included reflexively in its own sphere of action: for *rationality itself to be rationalized*.[1]

Indeed, if we define modernization as the cultural differentiation of the spheres of life and the secularization of their corresponding activities, then the process is far from complete. The process of modernization, as it has evolved up to now, has created its own myths, sustaining a new credo which has been shielded from reasoned enquiry and rational criticism. The limits to rationalization which have thus been set down have become indefensible. What 'post-modernists' take to be the end of modernity and the crisis of Reason is in reality the crisis of the quasi-religious irrational contents upon which the selective and partial rationalization we call industrialism – bearer of a conception of the universe and a vision of the future which are now untenable – is based.

As long as we remain bound by this vision, we will continue to cling to individual pursuits and nostalgic views of the past, incapable of giving either meaning or direction to the changes which have caused the destruction of our past beliefs.

I do not mean to insinuate by such statements that rationalization could, or should, be extended indefinitely until it absorbs everything

which has thus far escaped its grasp. On the contrary, I hope to demonstrate that rationalization has ontological and existential limits, and that these limits can only be crossed by means of pseudo-rationalizations, themselves irrational, in which rationalization becomes its opposite.

One of my principal objectives here will be to delimit the sphere of what can be rationalized. As starting point I will take a commentary on a text which unintentionally brings us straight to the heart of the crisis of that particular form of rationality we call economic, a rationality unaware of how narrow its proper limits are. I shall then turn to the examination of the ideological and ethical presuppositions which have enabled it to expand beyond the practical sphere in which it is applicable.

In an article which is characteristic of the prevalent economic thinking, Lionel Stoleru writes:

> A wave of technological advances has rendered a whole series of jobs unnecessary and reduced employment on a huge scale without creating an equivalent number of jobs elsewhere. . . . It will enable us to produce more and better with less human effort: savings in manufacturing costs and in working time will increase purchasing power and *create new areas of activity elsewhere in the economy (if only in leisure activities).*[2]

Stoleru later returns to this last point to make it clear that these new activities will be *paid* activities, *jobs* although they will not be properly 'work' as it has been understood up to now:

> The substitution of robotics and computer communications for human labour . . . allows a value to be released which is greater than the wages previously paid out. . . . This value is then available *for remunerating those who have lost their jobs.* Unemployment constitutes a displacement of activity rather than the abolition of jobs.

The interest of this apparently economic text lies in the wealth of different explicit and implicit meanings it contains. To begin with, Stoleru, by contrast with the majority of political leaders and apologists for the employers, admits that the current technical changes save on working hours *across the whole of society* and not just on the scale of particular enterprises: they allow more and better production using fewer working hours and less capital; they allow not only wage costs to be reduced but also costs in capital per unit produced.[3] Computerization and robotization have, then, an economic rationality, which is characterized precisely by the desire to *economize*, that is, to use the factors of

production as efficiently as possible. We shall return to this type of rationality later on, to examine it in greater detail. For the moment, suffice it to say that a rationality whose aim is to *economize* on these 'factors' requires that it be possible to *measure, calculate and plan* their deployment and to express the factors themselves, whatever they may be, in terms of a single unit of measurement. This unit of measurement is the 'unit cost', a cost which is itself a function of the working time (the number of hours worked) contained in the product and the means (broadly speaking, the capital, which is accumulated labour) used to produce it.

From the point of view of economic rationality, the working time saved across the whole of society, thanks to the increasing efficiency of the means used, constitutes working time made available for the production of additional wealth. This is precisely the point made by Stoleru (indeed, he returns to it twice to stress his point). The working time saved, he writes, 'allows for the remuneration of those who have lost their jobs' by employing them to perform other economic activities, or by paying them to perform activities which were previously neither paid nor considered to be part of the economy. It allows for new jobs to be created 'elsewhere in the economy, if only', as Stoleru makes clear, 'in leisure activities'.

The model implicitly envisaged here is consequently one of an economy which is continually absorbing new spheres of activity at the same time as working time is being liberated in spheres that were previously part of the economy. This expansion in the scope of the economy will nonetheless lead, according to its own rationality, to new savings in time. Economicizing, that is, including within the economic sphere what was once excluded, means that time-generating economic rationalization will gain ground and release increasing quantities of free time.

This can well be seen in the directions most often suggested to ensure 'new growth': they concern, on the one hand, the computerization and robotization of household tasks (for example, 'telephone shopping', automatic, computer-programmed cooking, the electronic cottage), and, on the other, the at least partial industrialization and computerization of services providing catering, cleaning, bodily care, education, childcare and so on. Economic rationalization appears thus destined to penetrate the sphere of 'reproduction' in which domestic labour, which is neither remunerated nor accounted for, nor, more often than not, even measured as regards the time spent on it, is still dominant. The explicit goals of the innovations proposed are to save time, and, more especially, to liberate women or households from household chores.

To say that they will 'create jobs' is a paradoxical way of denying the

economic rationality which is, in other respects, their justification: the aim of fast-food chains, domestic robots, home computers, rapid hairdressing salons and the like, is not to *provide work* but to save it. Where paid labour (that is, jobs) is really necessary in these areas, the quantity of paid labour provided is much lower than the quantity of domestic labour saved. If this were not the case, these products and services would be financially inaccessible and devoid of interest for the vast majority of people: in order to obtain an hour of free time, the average wage earner would have to spend the equivalent of – or possibly more than – the wage she or he earned in one hour of work; he or she would have to work at least an extra hour in order to gain an extra hour of free time; the time saved in performing domestic tasks would have to be spent working (or working extra time) at the factory or the office, and so on. Now the use value of domestic appliances and industrialized services lies precisely, by contrast, in the *net* time they gain for us, and their exchange value in their high productivity per hour: the user spends less time working in order to earn enough to purchase these products or services, than she or he spends in providing these services for him- or herself. This is indeed a liberation of time across the whole of society.

The question we must ask, then, is what meaning we wish to give this new-found free time and what content we wish to give it. Economic reason is fundamentally incapable of providing an answer to this question. To consider, as Stoleru does, that it will be filled by activities 'elsewhere in the economy, if only in leisure activities', is to forget that when the time saved in traditional economic activities is used to economicize activities previously excluded from the economic sphere, additional time will be saved as a result of this displacement. The expansion of the sphere of economic rationality, made possible by savings in working time, leads to savings in time even in activities which were previously not counted as work. 'Advances in technology' thus inevitably pose the question of the meaning and content of free time; better still, of the nature of a civilization and a society in which there is far more free time than working time and in which, therefore, economic rationality ceases to govern everyone's time.

Including leisure activities within the economic sphere and assuming that their expansion will generate new economic activities appears at first to be a paradoxical way of avoiding the above question. The rationality governing leisure activities is, in fact, the opposite of the rationality governing economic activities: such activities consume rather than create free time; their aim is not to save time but to spend it. This is holiday time, time for extravagance, time for gratuitous activity which is an end in itself. In short, such time has no utility, nor is it the means

to any other end and the categories of instrumental rationality (efficiency, productivity, performance) are not applicable to it, except to pervert it.

To state, as Stoleru does, that leisure activities generate, that they indeed demand, new paid activities is not, however, totally absurd, provided that society is viewed not as a single but as a dual economic entity. And this is, in effect, what the majority of writers do. The continued division of society as they conceive it will be inevitable. The reason for this division will be (as it is already) the unequal distribution of the savings made in working hours: an increasingly large section of the population will continue to be expelled, or else marginalized, from the sphere of economic activities, whilst another section will continue to work as much as, or even more than, it does at present, commanding, as a result of its performances or aptitudes, ever-increasing incomes and economic powers. Unwilling to give up part of their work and the prerogatives and powers that go with their jobs, the members of this professional elite will only be able to increase their leisure time by getting third parties to procure their free time for them. Therefore they will ask these third parties to do in their place all the things everyone is capable of doing, particularly all labour referred to as 'reproduction'. And they will purchase services and appliances which will allow them to save time *even when producing these services and appliances takes more time than the average person will save by using them.* They will thus foster the development, across the whole of society, of activities which have no economic rationality – since the people performing them have to spend more time in doing them than the people benefiting from them actually save – and which only serve the private interests of the members of this professional elite, who are able to purchase time more cheaply than they can sell it personally. These are activities performed by *servants,* whatever the status of the people who do them or method of payment used.

The division of society into classes involved in intense economic activity on the one hand, and a mass of people who are marginalized or excluded from the economic sphere on the other, will allow a sub-system to develop, in which the economic elite will buy leisure time by getting their own personal tasks done for them, at low cost, by other people. The work done by personal servants and enterprises providing personal services makes more time available for this elite and improves their quality of life; the leisure time of this economic elite provides jobs, which are in most cases insecure and underpaid, for a section of the masses excluded from the economic sphere.

Stoleru makes no reference to this division but it appears, thinly disguised, in the following analysis by Edmond Maire:

> There will be a progressive decrease in the industrial products we purchase, not in terms of quantity but in terms of value, because automation will reduce the price of most of these products. The purchasing power released in this way, combined with the purchasing power arising from future growth, will allow for the expansion of the so-called neighbourhood services to be financed. . . . Even now certain users already have the purchasing power available to do this.[4]

This analysis is based entirely on the fact, nowhere admitted in the text, that automation is able to produce a reduction in price *because it reduces wage costs* or, in other words, the number of paid workers. Obviously, the people who will enjoy this additional purchasing power as a result of prices coming down will be the ones who can retain well-paid, permanent jobs and not the workers who will be expelled or excluded from production. *They alone* will be able to afford the neighbourhood market services whose development Edmond Maire predicts will create 'millions of jobs'. The people paid to do these jobs will be, directly or indirectly, in the service of the privileged sections of society who will benefit from automation.

The unequal distribution of work in the economic sphere, coupled with the unequal distribution of the free time created by technical innovations thus leads to a situation in which one section of the population is able to buy extra spare time from the other and the latter is reduced to serving the former. Social stratification of this type is different from stratification in terms of class. By contrast with the latter, it does not reflect the laws immanent in the functioning of an economic system whose impersonal demands are made as much on managers of capital and company administrators as on paid workers. For a section at least of those who provide personal services, this type of social stratification amounts to subordination to and personal dependence upon the people they serve. A 'servile' class, which had been abolished by the industrialization of the post-war period, is again emerging.

Certain conservative governments, and even a number of trade unions, justify and promote this formidable social regression on the pretext that it permits the 'creation of jobs', that is, that servants increase the amount of time their masters can devote to activities which are highly productive in economic terms – as if the people who do 'odd jobs' were not also capable of productive or creative work; as if those who have services done for them were creative and competent every minute of their working day and were thus irreplaceable; as if it were not the very conception the latter have of their function and rights which is depriving the young people who deliver their hot croissants, newspapers and pizzas of chances of economic and social integration; as if, in a

word, the differentiation of economic tasks required such a degree of specialization that the stratification of society – into a mass of operatives, on the one hand, and a class of irreplaceable and overworked decision-makers and technicians who need a host of helpers to serve them personally in order to do their jobs, on the other – were inevitable.

Certainly, the existence of a servile class is less obvious today than it was during the periods when the affluent classes employed a large number of domestic servants (according to British censuses – in which they were categorized as 'domestic and personal servants' – the latter represented 14 per cent of the working population between 1851 and 1911). The difference is that nowadays these personal services are to a large extent socialized or industrialized: the majority of servants are employed by service enterprises which hire out labour (insecure, part-time employment; piecework; and so on) which is then exploited by private individuals. But this does not alter the basic fact that these people are doing servants' work, that is, work which those who earn a decent living transfer, for their personal advantage and without gains in productivity, on to the people for whom there is no work in the economy.

We are thus faced with a social system which is unable to distribute, manage or employ this new-found free time; a system fearful of the expansion of this time, yet which does its utmost to increase it, and which, in the end, can find no purpose for it other than seeking all possible means of turning it into money: that is, monetarizing, transforming into jobs and economicizing, in the form of increasingly specialized services for exchange on the market, even those previously free and autonomous activities capable of giving meaning to it.

To postulate, as is generally done, that the total amount of free time created by current rationalization and technicization can be re-employed 'elsewhere in the economy', as a result of the infinite expansion of the economic sphere, amounts to saying that there is no limit to the number of activities that can be transformed into paid services which generate employment; or, in other words, that in the end everyone, or nearly everyone, will have to sell a specialized service to others and buy from them everything they do not sell themselves; that the market exchange of time (without the creation of value) can absorb with impunity all areas of life, without destroying the meaning of the free, spontaneous activities and relations whose essential characteristic is to *serve* no purpose.

> It is [writes Hannah Arendt] a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of work, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this

> freedom would deserve to be won. . . . What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely nothing could be worse.[5]

Except, perhaps, disguising private activities and leisure activities themselves as work and jobs. This state of affairs, to which I will return later, is not such a distant possibility.

This crisis is, in fact, more fundamental than any economic or social crises. The utopia which has informed industrial societies for the last two hundred years is collapsing. And I use the term utopia in its contemporary philosophical sense here, as the vision of the future on which a civilization bases its projects, establishes its ideal goals and builds its hopes. When a utopia collapses in this way, it indicates that the entire circulation of values which regulates the social dynamic and the meaning of our activities is in crisis. This is the crisis we are faced with today. The industrialist utopia promised us that the development of the forces of production and the expansion of the economic sphere would liberate humanity from scarcity, injustice and misery; that these developments would bestow on humanity the sovereign power to dominate Nature, and with this the sovereign power of self-determination; and that they would turn work into a demiurgic and *auto-poietic* activity in which the incomparably individual fulfilment of each was recognized – as both right and duty – as serving the emancipation of all.

Nothing remains of this utopia. This does not mean that all is lost and that we have no other option but to let events take their course. It means we must find a new utopia, for as long as we are the prisoners of the utopia collapsing around us, we will remain incapable of perceiving the potential for liberation offered by the changes happening now, or of turning them to our advantage by giving meaning to them.

Notes

1. The idea of reflexive rationalization comes from Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt-am-Main 1986.

2. Lionel Stoleru, 'Le chômage de prospérité', *Le Monde*, 31 October 1986. My italics.

3. This fact is still frequently contested on the grounds that fixed capital *per job* shows a tendency to increase rapidly in industry and industrialized services, with no concomitant sudden decrease in the number of jobs. The fact is, however, that neither the capital immobilized per job nor the actual number of jobs tell us anything about the way in which the quantity of work absorbed by the economy is evolving: the only significant figure is the total number of hours worked in a year in the economy as a whole or, in other words, the 'volume of work'.

The West German statistics, which (unlike the French) measure this annual volume of work on a regular basis, provide the following data on the subject: the German GNP grew by a factor of 3.02 between 1955 and 1985; the annual volume of work diminished by 27 per cent during the same period. From 1982 to 1986, it diminished by a little over one billion hours, that is to say, by the equivalent of 600,000 full-time jobs. From 1984 to 1986, despite a decrease in the volume of work of 350 million hours, that is to say, the equivalent of more than 200,000 full-time jobs, the number of people in employment rose by 200,000. This increase in the number of active workers was due to a reduction in the collectively agreed working week and an increase in the number of part-time jobs.

This is to say, as I repeat, that the figures relating to the number of people out of work and the number of people gainfully employed do not provide us with the information necessary to measure the evolution of productivity or of the quantity of work utilized by the economy.

4. Edmond Maire, 'Le chômage zéro, c'est possible'. *Alternatives économiques*, 48, June 1987.

5. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5th edn, Chicago and London 1969, p. 5.

1

The Invention of Work

'Work' as we know it, is a modern invention. Work in the form in which we recognize and perform it, and to which we give a central place in the life of the individual and of society, was invented, then subsequently generalized only with the coming of industrialism. 'Work', in the modern sense, bears no relation to the tasks, repeated day after day, which are indispensable for the maintenance and reproduction of our individual lives. Neither should it be confused with the toil, however demanding it may be, which individuals undertake in order to complete tasks of which they, or their family, are the sole beneficiaries; nor with what we undertake on our own initiative, without counting the time and effort it takes us, for a purpose of no importance to anyone other than ourselves and which no one can do in our place. If we do happen to refer to these activities as 'work' – 'housework', 'artistic work', 'work of self-production' – it is in a fundamentally different sense from the work around which society revolves, and which is both its chief means and its ultimate goal.

For the essential characteristic of such work – which we 'have', 'seek' or 'offer' – is that it is an activity in the *public* sphere, demanded, defined and recognized as useful by other people and, consequently, as an activity they will pay for. It is by having ***paid*** work (more particularly, work for a wage) that we belong to the public sphere, acquire a social existence and a social identity (that is, a 'profession'), and are part of a network of relations and exchanges in which we are measured against other people and are granted certain rights over them in exchange for the duties we have towards them. It is because work paid and determined socially is by far the most important factor of socialization – even for those who are seeking it, preparing for it or who lack it – that industrial society views itself as a 'society of workers' and distinguishes

itself, on these grounds, from all earlier forms of society.

This demonstrates that the work on which social cohesion and citizenship are based cannot be reduced to 'work' as an anthropological category or as the need for Man to produce his means of subsistence 'by the sweat of his brow'. Indeed, labour, that is, work carried out in order to ensure survival, was never a factor of social integration. It was rather a criterion for exclusion: in all pre-modern societies, those who performed it were considered inferior. They belonged to the realm of Nature, not the human realm. They were slaves to necessity and therefore incapable of the high-mindedness and disinterestedness which would have rendered them capable of taking charge of the affairs of the city-state. As Hannah Arendt demonstrates at length,[1] in an argument based substantially on the research of Jean-Pierre Vernant, in Ancient Greece the labour necessary to satisfy vital human needs was considered a servile occupation incompatible with citizenship, that is, with participation in public affairs. Labour was considered unworthy of a citizen not because it was reserved for women or slaves; on the contrary, it was reserved for women and slaves precisely because 'to labour meant to be enslaved by necessity'.[2] And only those who, like slaves, had chosen to live rather than be free – thus proving their servile nature – could accept this enslavement. This is why Plato classes peasants with slaves, and why artisans (*banausoi*) insofar as they did not work for the city-state or in the public sphere, were not full citizens: 'their chief interest being their craft and not the market place'.[3] The free man refused to submit to necessity. He controls his body so he will not be a slave to his needs and, if he labours, he does so only in order not to be dependent on what he cannot control, that is, in order to ensure or increase his independence.

The idea that liberty, that is, the human realm, only begins 'beyond the realm of necessity', that Man is only capable of moral conduct when his actions cease to express his pressing bodily needs and dependence on the environment and are solely the result of his sovereign determination, is one which has persisted since the time of Plato. It reappears, in particular, in Marx in the famous passage in *Capital* Volume 3 in which he appears to contradict what he writes elsewhere by locating the 'realm of freedom' beyond economic rationality. Marx observes in this passage that capitalism's 'development of the productive forces' creates 'the embryonic conditions' which will make possible a 'greater reduction of time devoted to material labour'[4] and adds,

> In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. . . . Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom . . .[5]

In this passage, Marx does not consider the labour which consists of producing and reproducing the material requirements of life as belonging to the sphere of freedom, any more than Greek philosophy did. There is, however, a fundamental difference between labour in capitalist society and labour in the ancient world: in the former it is performed in the public sphere, whilst in the latter it was confined to the private sphere. Most of the *economy* in the ancient city-state consisted in private activity performed, not in public, in the market place, but within the sphere of the family and household. The organization and hierarchy of the latter was determined by the necessities of subsistence and reproduction. 'Natural community in the household therefore was born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it.'[6] Freedom only commenced outside the private, *economic* household sphere. The sphere of freedom was the public sphere of the *polis*. 'The *polis* was distinguished from the household in that it knew only "equals" whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality.'[7] It had to 'master . . . the necessities of life'[8] so that the *polis* could be the sphere of freedom, that is, the sphere of disinterested quest for the common good and the 'good life'.

> What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, took for granted was that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity – for instance, by ruling over slaves – and to become free. . . . [Violence] is the prepolitical act of liberating oneself from the necessity of life for the freedom of the world.[9]

Thus the private sphere of the family coincided with the sphere of economic necessity and labour, whilst the public, political sphere, which was the sphere of freedom, rigorously excluded activities which were necessary or useful from the domain of 'human affairs'. All the citizens belonged simultaneously to these carefully separated spheres, passing continually from one to the other, and endeavouring to minimize the burden of the necessities of life, shifting it on to their slaves and their wives on the one hand, and controlling and limiting their needs by adhering to the discipline of a life of frugality on the other. The very notion of the citizen as 'worker' was inconceivable in this context: the worker was doomed to servitude and confined to the household sphere. Far from being a source of 'social identity', 'labour' defined private existence and excluded those who were enslaved by it from the public sphere.

The modern notion of labour only appeared, in fact, with the advent of manufacturing capitalism. Until that point, that is, until the eighteenth century, the term 'labour' (*travail, Arbeit, lavoro*) referred to the toil of serfs and day-labourers who produced consumer goods or services necessary for life which had to be recommenced day after day without ever producing any lasting results. Craftworkers, on the other hand, who created durable objects which could be accumulated and which the people who acquired them more often than not bequeathed to posterity, did not 'labour', they 'produced works' [*œuvraient*], possibly using in their 'work' the 'labour' of unskilled workers whose job it was to do menial tasks. Only day-labourers and unskilled workers were paid for their 'labour'; craftworkers were paid for their 'works' [*œuvre*] according to a price-list fixed by the professional trade unions – the corporations and guilds – which strictly forbade all innovations and forms of competition. In seventeenth-century France, new techniques and machines had to be approved by a council of elders composed of four merchants and four weavers, and then authorized by the judges. The wages earned by day-labourers and apprentices were fixed by the corporation and protected from all attempts to bargain over them.

'Material production', therefore, was not on the whole governed by economic rationality. Nor would it become so with the expansion of merchant capitalism. For example, in textile production, until around 1830 in Great Britain, and around the end of the nineteenth century in the rest of Europe, manufacturing capitalism, and then industrial capitalism, coexisted with cottage industry, the greater part of which was undertaken by individuals working from home. As with the cultivation of the soil for the peasant, weaving was, for the home weaver, not just a means of earning a living: it was a *way of life* governed by traditions which, while they might have been irrational from an economic point of view, were respected by the capitalist merchants. These merchants, participants in a system of life that looked after the respective interests of both parties, did not even contemplate rationalizing the *labour* of the home weavers, putting them in competition with each other or striving to achieve maximum profit in a rational and systematic way. Max Weber's description of the system of domestic production and its ultimate destruction by the manufacturing system is instructive in this regard:

> Until about the middle of the past century the life of a putter-out was, at least in many of the branches of the Continental textile industry, what we should today consider very comfortable. We may imagine its routine somewhat as follows: The peasants came with their cloth, often (in the case of linen) principally or entirely made from raw material which the peasant himself had produced, to the town in which the putter-out lived, and after a careful, often official, appraisal of the quality, received the customary price for it. The putter-out's customers, for markets any appreciable distance away, were middlemen, who also came to him, generally not yet following samples, but seeking traditional qualities, and bought from his warehouse, or, long before delivery, placed orders which were probably in turn passed on to the peasants. Personal canvassing of customers took place, if at all, only at long intervals. Otherwise correspondence sufficed, though the sending of samples slowly gained ground. The number of business hours was very moderate, perhaps five to six a day, sometimes considerably less; in the rush season, where there was one, more. Earnings were moderate; enough to lead a respectable life and in good times to put away a little. On the whole, relations among competitors were relatively good, with a large degree of agreement on the fundamentals of business. A long daily visit to the tavern, with often plenty to drink, and a congenial circle of friends, made life comfortable and leisurely.
>
> The *form* of organization was in every respect capitalistic; the entrepreneur's activity was of a purely business character; the use of capital, turned over in the business, was indispensable; and finally, the objective aspect of the economic process, the bookkeeping, was rational. But it was traditionalistic business, if one considers the *spirit* which animated the entrepreneur: the traditional manner of life, the traditional rate of profit, the traditional amount of work, the traditional manner of regulating the relationships with labour, and the essentially traditional circle of customers and the manner of attracting new ones. All these dominated the conduct of the business, were at the basis, one may say of the *ethos* of this group of business men.
>
> Now at some time this leisureliness was suddenly destroyed, and often without any essential change in the *form* of organization, such as the transition to a unified factory [*geschlossener Betrieb*], to mechanical weaving, etc. What happened was, on the contrary, often no more than this: some young man from one of the putting-out families went out into the country, carefully chose weavers for his employ, greatly increased the rigour of his supervision of their work, and thus turned them from peasants into labourers. On the other hand, he would begin to change his marketing methods by so far as possible going directly to the final consumer, would take the details into his own hands, would personally solicit customers, visiting them every year, and above all would adapt the quality of the product directly to their needs and wishes. At the same time he began to introduce the principle of low prices and large turnover.
>
> There was repeated what everywhere and always is the result of such a process of rationalization: those who would not follow suit had to go out of business. The idyllic state collapsed under the pressure of a bitter competitive struggle, respectable fortunes were made, and not lent out at interest, but always reinvested in the business. The old leisurely and comfortable attitude toward life gave way to a hard frugality in which some participated and came to the top, because they did not wish to consume but to earn, while others who wished to keep on with the old ways were forced to curtail their consumption.

> And, what is most important in this connection, it was not generally in such cases a stream of new money invested in the industry which brought about this revolution – in several cases known to me the whole revolutionary process was set in motion with a few thousands of capital borrowed from relations – but the new *spirit*, the spirit of modern capitalism, had set to work.[10]

All that remained to be done was to construct the factory system on the ruins of the system of domestic production. As we shall see, this was no easy business.

We shall return later to the question of the underlying motivations which led the capitalist merchants to break with tradition and rationalize production with a cold and brutal logic. For the moment, it is enough to point out that these motivations, according to Max Weber, contained an 'irrational element'[11] whose decisive importance tends to be underestimated. The *interest* for the capitalist merchants in rationalizing weaving, controlling its cost and making it possible to calculate and predict this cost with precision, was by no means a new development. What was new was that at a particular point in time the merchants attempted to impose it on their suppliers, whereas they had previously refrained from doing so. Max Weber puts forward a convincing argument to show that their earlier restraint was not for legal, technical or economic reasons but for ideological and cultural ones: 'one may – this simple proposition, which is often forgotten, should be placed at the beginning of every study which essays to deal with rationalism – rationalize life from fundamentally different basic points of view and in very different directions.'[12] What was new about the 'spirit of capitalism' was the one-dimensional, narrow way in which the capitalist entrepreneur, concerned only with financial factors, pushed economic rationality to its extremes:

> Similarly, it is one of the fundamental characteristics of an individualistic capitalistic economy that it is rationalized on the basis of rigorous calculation, directed with foresight and caution toward the economic success which is sought in sharp contrast to the hand-to-mouth existence of the peasant, and to the privileged traditionalism of the guild craftsman and of the adventurers' capitalism . . . but it at the same time expresses what is, seen from the viewpoint of personal happiness, so irrational about this sort of life, where a man exists for the sake of his business, instead of the reverse.[13]

In other words, economic rationality was, for a long time, held in check not only by tradition, but also by other types of rationality, other goals and interests which set limits that were not to be exceeded. Industrial capitalism was only able to take off when economic rationality freed itself from all the other principles of rationality and submitted

them to its dictatorial control.

Indeed, Marx and Engels say the same thing themselves in the *Communist Manifesto*, although they have a somewhat different approach: according to them, the bourgeoisie had finally torn away the veil which had hitherto masked *the reality* of social relations: 'It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound men to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest . . . for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.' It has 'torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation . . . It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about . . . [During] its rule of scarce one hundred years, [it] has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.' Whereas

> [conservation] of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was . . . the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes . . . [The] bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the whole relations of society . . . All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

In short, they maintained that the one-dimensional reductionism of economic rationality characteristic of capitalism would have potentially emancipatory implications, in that it swept away all values and purposes that were irrational from an economic point of view, leaving nothing but money relations between individuals, nothing but power relations between classes, nothing but an instrumental relation between Man and Nature, thus giving birth to a class of completely dispossessed worker-proletarians, reduced to nothing more than an indefinitely interchangeable labour power and divested of any particular interest: '[The] work of the proletarians . . . has lost all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him.' These 'privates of the industrial army . . . placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants' embody a human race stripped of its humanity, a human race which can only gain access to this humanity by seizing all the forces of production developed by society – the implication being that it will have to revolutionize society

completely. According to Marx, the seeds of Universal Man are to be found within abstract labour.

It is, then, according to the Marxian view, this self-same process of rationalization which, on the one hand, engenders a demiurgic, *poietic* relationship between Man and Nature as a result of mechanization and, on the other, bases the 'colossal' power of the forces of production on an organization of labour which strips both work and worker of all their human qualities. The direct agent of the domination by machines of Nature and the *auto-poiesis* of mankind is a proletarian class of individuals who are 'stunted' and 'crippled', stupefied by their labour, oppressed by hierarchy and dominated by the machinery they serve. Herein lies the contradiction which is to become the meaning and motor of history: as a result of capitalist rationalization, work ceases to be an individual activity and a submission to basic necessities; but at the precise point at which it is stripped of its limitations and servility to become *poiesis*, the affirmation of universal strength, it dehumanizes those who perform it. Industrial labour, which is both a triumphant domination over basic necessities and a submission to the instruments of this domination more constricting than Man's earlier subservience to Nature, shows evidence, in the works of Marx as in the great classics of economy, of an ambivalence which we should keep constantly in mind. The apparent contradictions in Marx, as indeed in most of us, are explained by this ambivalence. And it is this ambivalence which misleads Hannah Arendt.[14] We must examine it in greater detail.

The economic rationalization of labour was by far the most difficult task industrial capitalism had to accomplish. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx refers frequently to the wealth of literature describing the resistance, for a long time insurmountable, which the first industrial capitalists came up against. It was essential for their enterprise to calculate and forecast labour costs accurately, since it was on this condition alone that the volume and price of the merchandise produced and the expected profit could be calculated. Without these forecast figures, the risk involved in making investments was too great. To make the cost of labour calculable, it was necessary to make its output calculable as well. It had to be possible to treat it as a quantifiable material unit; in other words, to be able to measure it in itself, as an independent entity, isolated from the individual characteristics and motivations of the worker. But this also implied that the workers would enter the process of production stripped of their personality and individuality, their personal goals and desires, as simple *labour power*, which was interchangeable and comparable to that of any other workers and which served goals which were not their own and, moreover, meant nothing to them.

The scientific organization of industrial labour consisted in a constant effort to separate labour, as a quantifiable economic category, from the workers themselves. This effort initially took the form of the mechanization, not of labour, but of the actual workers: that is, it took the form of output targets imposed by the rhythm or rate of work. Indeed, piecework, which would have been the most economically rational method, proved from the beginning to be impracticable: for workers at the end of the eighteenth century, 'work' meant the application of an intuitive know-how[15] that was an integral part of a time-honoured rhythm of life, and they would not have dreamt of intensifying and prolonging their efforts in order to earn more. The worker 'did not ask: how much can I earn in a day if I do as much work as possible? but: how much must I work in order to earn the wage, 2½ marks, which I earned before and which takes care of my traditional needs?'[16]

The unwillingness of the workers to do a full day's labour, day after day, was the principal reason why the first factories went bankrupt. The bourgeoisie put this reluctance down to 'laziness' and 'indolence'. They saw no other means of overcoming this problem than to pay the workers such meagre wages that it was necessary for the latter to do a good ten hours' toil every day of the week in order to earn enough to survive:

> It is a fact well known . . . that the manufacturer [worker] who can subsist on three days' work will be idle and drunken the remainder of the week . . . The poor . . . will never work any more time in general than is necessary just to live and support their weekly debauches . . . We can fairly aver that a reduction of wages in the woollen manufacture would be a national blessing and advantage, and no real injury to the poor.[17]

In order to cover its need for a stable workforce, nascent industry in the end resorted to child labour as being the most practical solution. For as Ure observed, writing of workers from rural or artisanal backgrounds, 'it is found nearly impossible to convert persons past the age of puberty into useful factory hands'.[18] Ure found that after the factory owner's initial struggle to break their habits of nonchalance or idleness, they either spontaneously left his employ or were dismissed by the overseers for lack of attention to their duties.

The economic rationalization of labour did not, therefore, consist merely in making pre-existent productive activities more methodical and better adapted to their object. It was a revolution, a subversion of the way of life, the values, the social relations and relation to Nature, the *invention* in the full sense of the word of something which had never existed before. Productive activity was cut off from its meaning, its motivations and its object and became simply a *means* of earning a wage. It ceased to be part of life and became the *means* of 'earning a

living'. Time for working and time for living became disjointed; labour, its tools, its products acquired a reality distinct from that of the worker and were governed by decisions taken by someone else. The satisfaction of 'producing works' together and the pleasure derived from 'doing' were abolished in favour of only those satisfactions that money could buy. In other words, concrete labour could only be transformed into what Marx called 'abstract labour' by turning the worker/producer into a worker/consumer: that is, the social individual who produces nothing she or he consumes and consumes nothing he or she produces; for whom the essential objective of work is to earn enough to buy commodities produced and defined by the social machine as a whole.

The economic rationalization of work will thus sweep away the ancient idea of freedom and existential autonomy. It produces individuals who, being alienated in their work, will, necessarily, be alienated in their consumption as well and, eventually, in their needs. Since there is no limit to the quantity of money that can be earned and spent, there will no longer be any limit to the needs that money allows them to have or to the need for money itself. These needs increase in line with social wealth. The monetarization of work and needs will eventually abolish the limitations which the various philosophies of life had placed on them.

Notes

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (HC) 5th edn, Chicago and London 1969, ch. 3.
2. HC, p. 83.
3. HC, p. 81
4. Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, London 1972 p. 819.
5. Marx, p. 820.
6. HC, p. 30.
7. HC, p. 32.
8. HC, pp. 30–1.
9. HC, p. 31.
10. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London/Sydney 1985, pp. 66–8.
11. Weber, p. 78.
12. Weber, pp. 77–8.
13. Weber, pp. 76, 70.
14. Hannah Arendt (*The Human Condition*) argues that Marx reduces work to *labour* while at the same time continuing to view it in some places as 'making works' and, at others, to forecast its abolition.
15. This is not to say it did not demand an apprenticeship but that this apprenticeship did not demand a formalized standard knowledge.
16. Weber, p. 60.
17. J. Smith, 'Memoirs of Wool', quoted by Stephen Marglin in André Gorz, ed., *The Division of Labour*, Hassocks 1976, p. 34.
18. Andrew Ure, *Philosophy of Manufacturers*, London 1835, p. 16, quoted by Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, Harmondsworth 1976, p. 549.

2

The Utopia of Work in Marx

These developments had been anticipated by Marx as early as the *1844 Manuscripts* in which the 'worker' (*Arbeiter*: which we ought to translate as 'labourer', if usage did not dictate otherwise) – and work too – are presented as 'products of capital':[1] work being 'work in general', any sort of work, irrespective of its determinations which, from the worker's point of view, are always 'accidental' and alien. This latter therefore no longer has any determinate, 'natural' place in society, nor, as a consequence, any particular interest. Her or his work reflects '*universal* dependence, that natural form of the universal collaboration of individuals', and it is, according to Marx, the abstraction of this work and the individuals that it defines which contains the germ of their universality. The division of labour into an infinite number of interchangeable tasks of an indifferent, 'accidental' character, which is now seen as social (and no longer natural), suppresses the 'limited relationship of men to Nature' and their 'limited relationship to one another' and, as 'the universal development of the productive forces', engenders a '*universal* intercourse between men', 'which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their *world-historical*, instead of local, being'.[2]

Certainly, from the *1844 Manuscripts* onwards, Marx observed, following J-B. Say, that 'The division of labour is a *convenient* and *useful* method, an intelligent use of human forces for increasing social wealth, but it diminishes *the capacity of each man* taken individually'.[3] He pushes this point to even more radical conclusions in *The German Ideology*:

> Never, in any earlier period, have the productive forces taken on a form so indifferent to the intercourse of individuals *as* individuals, because their inter-

course itself was formerly a restricted one. On the other hand, standing over against these productive forces, we have the majority of the individuals from whom these forces have been wrested away, and who, robbed thus of all life-content, have become abstract individuals . . .

The only connection which still links them with the productive forces and with their own existence – *labour – has lost all semblance of self-activity* and only sustains their life by stunting it.[4]

Even more scathing characterizations of the nature of industrial labour and its debilitating character are found in the *Grundrisse* and, subsequently, in *Capital.* But for Marx this dehumanizing, debilitating, idiotic, exhausting labour nevertheless represents a form of objective progress to the extent that it substitutes 'general workers' – the proletarians – for private producers – artisans – thus giving birth to a class for whom *work* is directly *social* labour determined in its contents by the functioning of society *as a whole* and which, consequently, has a vital, overriding interest in taking over the social process of production in its totality.

In order better to understand how Marx, after 1846, conceives the proletariat as a potentially universal class, divested of any particular interest and therefore in a position to appropriate for itself and rationalize the social process of production, we should look first of all at a much more explicit passage which he devotes in the *Grundrisse* to market production as a *private* activity.[5] He insists at length in this passage on the fact that the product an individual manufactures for the market only acquires its exchange value, and therefore is only of advantage to its producer, on condition that it finds a place in the *social* process of production, within which it alone becomes exchangeable. Now, adds Marx, if it becomes exchangeable, it does so because it is a particular concretization, of use to others, of a *general labour* contributing to social production as a whole. The work of production is socially divided into a multiplicity of complementary instances of production for the market, each dependent upon the other, each determined in its nature and its content by the functioning of society as a whole (*'gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhang'*). But this division of labour, this coherence of complementarities 'remains an external and, as it seems, accidental thing' to the individuals who confront each other on the market.

The social interrelation [*Zusammenhang*], which results from the encounter [*Zusammenstoss*] of independent individuals and appears to them as both a material necessity and an external bond, represents precisely *their independence, for which social existence is indeed a necessity, but only as a means, and therefore appears to individuals as something external.*[6]

The situation is quite different for the proletarians who, being directly tied to collective labour in general have a direct interest in uniting together as a collective worker and, by their union, in subordinating the social process of production to their common control, by substituting voluntary collaboration for socially divided work. The proletarianization of the producers therefore promises to be merely one facet of a grandiose and potentially emancipatory enterprise of rational unification of the social process.

There is no question, therefore, of going back to the past, of seeking, by '[setting] factories ablaze, . . . to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages.'[7] Quite the reverse. The point is to see how individuals, at last freed from their 'limited relations' and now directly geared in to the 'universal intercourse between men' may – no longer being anything determinate – 'become all', may become the universal subjects of a total activity because they are no longer engaged in an individual private activity of any kind.

The philosophical context and reasoning which led Marx to this dialectical overturning are presently of little relevance to us. All that matters here is its utopian content, because it is this utopian vision which has penetrated the labour movement and which still today provides the energy behind the ideology of work shared by the various strains of the classical Left. We must, therefore, first of all, understand the contents to which the Marxian utopia owes its lasting attraction and then examine to what extent these contents still exist today and still have their original meaning.

When, in 1845–46, he formulated it for the first time in *The German Ideology*, Marx clearly had difficulty in giving his utopian conception, communism, a compelling rational coherence. Unlike the utopians whose visions of a future society express ideals deriving from ethical exigencies, Marx is seeking to show that there is no need for communism to pre-exist in the consciousness of the proletariat for it to be realized; it is 'the movement of the real' itself. Marx does not as yet base the necessity of its advent on the internal contradictions of capitalism's development, as he was to do after 1856; he bases it on the fact that, for the proletariat, the revolution is – or will become – essential for their survival. The 'absolute inexorable necessity' in which they find themselves, of having to destroy the old society merely 'to ensure their continuing existence', serves in a sense as a transcendental guarantee of their ultimate victory. This conception of the necessity of the communist revolution corresponds, all in all, to a period in which the labouring masses, reduced to the most extreme poverty, were rising up in the cause of the right to life.

Within these labouring masses, there remained however a high

proportion of ruined artisans and homeworkers who still kept alive the memory of a craft system based on the freedom and dignity of work. The communist utopia had therefore to guarantee the workers 'not only their material existence', but also the autonomy and dignity which capitalist rationalization had removed from work. Autonomy and dignity of work must not however be *restored* in the name of an individual and subjective ethical exigency opposed to economic rationality. It must, on the contrary, be shown that capitalist rationality is simply a limited rationality which inevitably produces overall effects which are contrary to its objectives and which it is incapable of controlling. True rationality consists in transforming work into a 'personal activity' but at a higher level at which 'the voluntary union' of individuals will put 'voluntary collaboration' in the place of capitalist division of labour and will subordinate the social process of production to the control of the associated producers. Each individual will 'as an individual' be master of the totality of the productive forces by means of voluntary collaboration. His 'work' will become his 'self-activity' (*Selbsttätigkeit*) as a 'total individual'.

The contradiction which so troubled Hannah Arendt no longer exists therefore: 'work' (*Arbeit*) in the sense that it was defined in the previous chapter will be eliminated (*beseitigt*) by rational social collaboration between individuals; in its place, we shall see the triumph of a collective *poiesis* which is no longer the labour of serialized and specialized individuals but the self-activity of individuals collaborating consciously and methodically. We here encounter once again the utopia of worker self-management and of workers' control; the unity of work and life; working activity as the total all-round development of the individual, a utopia which has remained alive right up to our own day.

It remains, however, for us to examine the rationalization of social collaboration envisaged by Marx from the point of view both of its possibility and of the rationality of the political and existential postulates on which it rests.[8]

Its principal utopian content is that within it the proletariat is destined to realize the unity of the real as the unity of Reason: individuals divested of any individual interest as they are divested of any individual trade, are to unite universally in order to make their collaboration rational and voluntary and to produce together, in a single common praxis, a world which is totally theirs: nothing shall exist there independently of them. This triumph of the unity of Reason obviously presupposes the reunification of the existential and social dimensions which modernization has differentiated to the point of making them autonomous (which does not mean independent) one from another. For to render impossible everything which exists independently of individuals

means also abolition of the state as an apparatus of law and administration standing outside the control of individuals; abolition of political economy with its own laws that impose themselves upon social actors; abolishing the social division and specialization of labour which to the extent that these 'subject individuals' to a 'limited instrument' make of them 'limited individuals', each locked into a limited function, and therefore incapable of perceiving and controlling social production as a whole through universal and voluntary collaboration. The generalized self-management of material production is thus supposed to make redundant not only the separate apparatus of management, administration and co-ordination, but also the political sphere itself. The universal voluntary collaboration of 'the united individuals' is supposed to be direct and transparent; it neither requires nor tolerates any mediation, for each individual 'as total individual' assumes the whole totality of social production as her or his personal task. This task allows each to accede to the dignity of universal subject and total personal development through the development of all his or her faculties.

The two basic presuppositions of this utopia are:

1. *On the political level,* that the physical rigidities and constraints of the social machine can be eliminated. All juridical regulation and codification of individual conduct can be abolished; the whole of individual actions and interactions can recover a lived intelligibility and meaning and therefore become based upon the individuals' own motivation to understand one another and collaborate rationally. It is this presupposition – the elimination, in Habermas's terminology, of the 'systemic constraints of the autonomized economic process' and its 'reintegration into the lifeworld'[9] – which Marx will ultimately have expressly rejected in the passage from *Capital* Volume 3 cited above. We shall return to this later.

2. *On the existential level,* that personal self-activity and social labour may coincide to such a degree that they become one and the same. Each individual must be able, by and in her or his work, to identify personally with the undivided totality of all (with the collective productive worker) and find his or her total personal fulfilment in that identification. All in all, a thoroughgoing socialization (in the sense of *Vergesellschaftung,* not *Sozialisierung*) of personal existence must correspond to the complete personalization of social existence, the whole of society possessing in each member its conscious subject and each member recognizing in it her or his unification with all the others.

The Marxian utopia – communism – therefore presents itself as the achieved form of rationalization: total triumph of Reason and triumph of total Reason; scientific domination of Nature and reflexive scientific mastery of the process of that domination. Not only will the collective end-product of social collaboration, which was previously 'left to chance' because this collaboration was not voluntary, be 'subordinated to the power of united individuals'; their union in 'voluntary collaboration' will itself be based upon the rational will of each and will ensure that the will of each coincides with the will of all, and that the individual worker is one with the collective worker.

This triumph of Reason very clearly presupposes the total rationalization of individual existence: the unity of Reason and life. And this total rationalization demands, for its part, an individual asceticism which, in certain respects, recalls Puritan asceticism: it is as universal individual, stripped of all individual interests, attachments and tastes, that each will accede to the true unity of the meaning of life and of history.

> . . .the sharp condemnation of idolatry of the flesh and of all dependence on *personal* relations to other men was bound unperceived to direct this energy into the field of objective (impersonal) activity. The Christian . . . acted in the service of God's ends, and these could only be impersonal. Every purely emotional, that is not rationally motivated, personal relation of man to man easily fell in the Puritan, as in every ascetic ethic, under the suspicion of idolatry of the flesh. In addition to what has already been said, this is clearly enough shown for the case of friendship by the following warning: 'It is an irrational act and not fit for a rational creature to love any one farther than *reason* will allow us . . . It very often taketh up men's minds so as to *hinder* their love of God. (Baxter, *Christian Directory*, IV, p. 253.)

One only has to replace 'Christian' by 'Communist', 'idolatry of the flesh' by 'petty-bourgeois individualism' and 'God's ends' by 'the meaning of history' in this passage quoted by Max Weber[10] to arrive at an accurate characterization of communist morality as it developed historically in Stalinism, Maoism and even Castroism. This resemblance between Puritan ethics and communist morality is mainly attributable to the fact that both the adaptation of life to the order of the world desired by God (Puritanism) and the tailoring of the conduct of each to the transpersonal goals of collective efficiency and history demand total rationalization of human conduct. Yet observations of this type explain nothing. We shall, rather, have to ask ourselves what deep motivations underlie the attraction which pan-rationalist asceticism has persistently exercised in its religious, political and – now, in its latest incarnation – technocratic forms. And we shall have to try and understand why the ideal of modernity, as expressed in its most complete form in the

Marxian utopic vision of a coincidence of social labour and personal activity, has produced disastrous results wherever efforts have been made to implement it on a macro-social scale.

Notes

1. 'The worker produces capital, capital produces him – hence he produces himself, and man as *worker*, as a *commodity*, is the product of this entire cycle. To the man who is nothing more than a *worker* – and to him as a worker – his human qualities only exist in so far as they exist for capital *alien* to him. Because man and capital are foreign to each other, however, and thus stand in an indifferent, external and accidental relationship to each other . . . As soon, therefore, as it occurs to capital (whether from necessity or caprice) no longer to be for the worker, he himself is no longer for himself: he has *no* work, hence *no* wages . . .' Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. D.J. Struik, trans. M. Mulligan, London 1970, p. 120. [Marx's emphasis.]
2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. W. Lough, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, 1845–1847, London 1976, pp. 86–7.
3. Marx's emphasis.
4. My emphasis.
5. *Grundrisse*, German edn, Berlin 1953, p. 909. [Our translation G.H./C.T.]
6. The same analysis can be found in Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social*, Paris 1930, pp. 242 and ff.
7. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Harmondsworth 1967.
8. The main passage in *The German Ideology* devoted to the question of 'necessary' collective appropriation and voluntary collaboration comes at the end of a section in which Marx demonstrates that the productive forces (which include labour itself) 'appear as a world for themselves, quite independent of and divorced from the individuals . . .' who, as a result of being split off from one another, have no purchase upon those forces, even though they have created them. 'Thus things have now come to such a pass', continues Marx,

> that the individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only to achieve self-activity, but, also, merely to safeguard their very existence . . . The appropriation of these forces is itself nothing more than the development of the individual capacities corresponding to the material instruments of production. *The appropriation of a totality of instruments is, for this very reason, the development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves* . . .
>
> All earlier revolutionary appropriations were restricted; individuals whose self-activity was restricted by a crude instrument of production and a limited intercourse, appropriated this crude instrument of production, and hence merely achieved a new state of limitation . . . they themselves remained subordinate to the division of labour and their own instrument of production . . . *in the appropriation by the proletarians, a mass of instruments of production must be made subject to each individual, and property to all.*

It is precisely because they are 'shut off from all self-activity' that 'the proletarians of the present day . . . are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of productive forces', an appropriation which demands a 'universal union'.

> Only at this stage *does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals* and the casting-off of all natural limitations. *The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transfor-*

mation of the earlier limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such. (*The German Ideology*, pp. 92–3, my emphasis).

See also *Grundrisse*, German edn, p. 505.

9. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handels*, vol. 2, Frankfurt/Main, 1981, p. 500. Subsequent extracts are taken from the English version, entitled *Theory of Communicative Action*, Cambridge 1987.

10. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London/Sydney 1985, p. 224.

3

Functional Integration or the Divorce between Working and Living

In order to exist and to keep going, an industrial enterprise needs more than machines, raw materials and labour; it also needs to be able to calculate its costs in advance, anticipate the demand for its goods and programme its production, investments and amortization. In other words, it needs to render calculable the factors on which the economic rationality of its management depends. And these factors are not exclusively internal to its functioning. There are also external factors, that is, factors determined by the enterprise's political, legal, administrative and cultural environment. The greater the amount of capital immobilized, the greater the length of time required for it to produce a profit and the more important it becomes for the enterprise that the conduct, not only of its employees but also of the government, the administrative bodies and the courts, be predictable and reliable. '. . . modern capitalist enterprise . . . presupposes a legal and administrative system whose functioning can be rationally predicted . . . just like the expected performance of a machine.'[1] The conduct of the enterprise can only conform to economic rationality if all spheres of society and even the life of the individual are conducted in a rational, predictable and calculable way.

Hence the importance Max Weber and his descendants, even distant ones like Habermas, attribute to capitalism's rootedness in culture: the rationalization of spheres of activity leading to their differentiation; this demanding in its turn a rationalization of the politico-juridicial sphere incompatible with the arbitrary exercise of power of an absolutist state; and ultimately resulting in the differentiation and complexification of the economic, administrative, scientific and artistic spheres and in their relative autonomy.

As the economy, administrative bodies, the state and science become differentiated and give rise to complex apparatuses, their development

and functioning demand an increasingly complex division of skills and competences, an increasingly differentiated *organization* of increasingly specialized *functions*. The overall working of these apparatuses is beyond the comprehension of the individuals within them and even of the individuals (ministers, managing directors, departmental heads and so on) who (formally) bear institutional responsibility for them.

As it becomes more complex, the organization of specialized functions, for the purpose of accomplishing a task which exceeds the comprehension of any individual, is increasingly unable to rely on the agents' own motivations for accomplishing this task. Their favourable disposition, personal capacities and goodwill are not enough. Their reliability will only be ensured by the formal *codification* and *regulation* of their conduct, their duties and their relationships. I term *functional* any conduct which is rationally programmed to attain results beyond the agents' comprehension, irrespective of their intentions. *Functionality* is a type of rationality which comes from the *outside* to the conduct determined and specified for the agent by the organization in which she or he is subsumed.[2] This conduct is the *function* which the agent has to perform unquestioningly. The more it grows, the more the organization tends to function like a machine.

Once the process has been set in motion, it develops its own dynamic: each step in the differentiation of competences produces an increase in bureaucratization which permits an increase in the differentiation of competences and so on. The economic and administrative apparatuses become differentiated, more complex and bureaucratized in synergy. The result of this, for individuals in their work, is that their *field* of responsibility and scope for initiative (but not necessarily their responsibility and initiative as such) are narrowed and, what is more, the coherence and goals of the organization – within which they are more or less consenting cogs – become less and less intelligible.

I term *sphere of heteronomy* the totality of specialized activities which individuals have to accomplish as functions co-ordinated from outside by a pre-established organization.[3] Within this sphere of heteronomy, the nature and content of tasks, as well as their relations to each other, are hetero-determined in such a way as to make individuals and organizations – which are themselves complex – function like the cogs of a huge machine (be it industrial, bureaucratic or military); or, which amounts to the same thing, to make them accomplish in isolation from each other specialized tasks demanded by a machine which, because of its dimensions and the number of attendants needed, deprives the workers of any possibility of co-ordinating their activities through procedures of self-regulated co-operation (through workers' self-management). This is the case, for example, not only in postal, rail and air networks and in power

generation, but also in all industries which make use of a large number of specialized plants, often situated very far apart, to supply the components for a single final product.

The kind of collaboration and integration found in the sphere of heteronomy differs radically from the co-operation and integration found between members of a work group or work community. Undoubtedly, hetero-determined collaboration, such as the kind organized by Taylorism or 'scientific work organization' still involves, necessarily, a minimum of self-regulated co-operation, a minimum of agreement and cohesion between the members of the small teams of people engaged in the same task and, therefore, a minimum of social integration. Yet nevertheless, this collaboration is itself functionally integrated as a cog in a more complex machinery.

There is an obvious relationship between what I term sphere of heteronomy and functional integration and what Habermas calls 'system' and 'systemic integration' on the one hand, as opposed to 'lifeworld' and 'social integration'[4] on the other. The latter 'is integrated through consensus, whether normatively guaranteed or communicatively achieved.'[5] 'Systemic integration', on the other hand, 'is integrated through the non-normative steering of individual decisions not subjectively co-ordinated.'[6] Habermas insists forcefully, on several occasions, on the fact that society has to be viewed as pertaining to both the 'system' and the 'lifeworld', that is, as being socially *and* functionally integrated, without ever being *entirely* either the one or the other: it could only coincide with the 'lifeworld' if all the systemic interrelations between individuals' relations with each other could become an integral part of their intuitive knowledge – in other words, be self-regulated by them with the purpose of pursuing a common aim and, therefore, abolished precisely as heteronomous ('systemic') imperatives. Conversely, society could only coincide with the 'system' if it were able to function like a mechanism determining for all its components a way of functioning that is strictly hetero-regulated from outside.

To put it another way, self-regulated ('social') integration refers to the ability of individuals to self-organize by co-ordinating their conduct with a view to obtaining a result by their collective action. This is what Sartre describes as a 'group' (not only a 'fused group' but also a group in the process of differentiating into 'specialized sub-groups' co-ordinated by a 'regulatory third party' who has been appointed for the purpose).[7] Hetero-regulated integration, by contrast, in which 'goal-directed actions are co-ordinated not only through processes of reaching understanding, but also through functional interconnections that are not intended by them and are usually not even perceived within the horizon of everyday practice',[8] refers to what Sartre describes as the external

totalization of the actions of serialized individuals.

There are, however, two types of hetero-regulation or totalization which are conflated in Habermas's system: first, one which derives from a totalization (which no one wanted, anticipated or planned) of serialized actions by the material field in which they inscribe themselves; and secondly, one which involves organized programming, an organization chart drawn up for the purpose of getting individuals, who are neither able to communicate nor to arrive at a mutual agreement, to realize a collective result, which they neither intend nor are, in many cases, even aware of.

The former type of hetero-regulation corresponds more particularly to regulation by the *market*. There is a tendency to consider this kind of hetero-regulation as self-regulation. In fact, it is a pure 'systemic mechanism' (Habermas) which imposes its laws from without on individuals who are then ruled by them and are forced to adapt and to modify their conduct and projects according to an external, statistical and totally involuntary balance of forces. The market *for them* is, then, an a-centred, *spontaneous hetero-regulation*.[9] It can only be regarded as a form of self-regulation if the social whole is viewed from the outside as a *purely material system* whose constituent parts, like the molecules of an inert gas or liquid, are only externally related to each other and, since they lack the capacity to pursue any goal, are individually of no interest.

The spontaneous hetero-regulation of serialized actions – notably by the market – has no *meaning* to individuals pursuing their own individual goals, independently of – and oblivious of – each other. In their external resultant, these actions have a certain coherence but that coherence is a product of chance: like thermodynamics, it is of the order of statistical laws and thus has neither meaning nor ultimate goal. Spontaneous hetero-regulation does not, properly speaking, produce the *integration* of individuals: what it integrates, as Sartre has shown very well, is the external materiality of actions insofar as it is beyond the grasp of the action and, far from corresponding to individuals' *own intentions*, it designates these individuals as *others*. These alienated actions are not functional to anything. One could only speak of functionality if their resultant were someone's goal. Now, the movements of prices which the buyers and sellers, each pursuing their own interests, bring about within a perfect market, do not, by definition, respond to the intention of any one of them and their behaviour is not therefore functional in relation to anything (except, in certain cases, in relation to the goals of someone secretly manipulating them by spreading false information and thereby distorting the market). Similarly, the market itself is not the goal of any of the actors who confront one another there; it is the space that results from their confrontation, just as

'traffic' is the external resultant of all those who are driving their cars at any particular moment and have – each of them as an 'other' – an average speed imposed upon them by all the other drivers, none of whom has actually chosen it.

If we say, however, that the market is also an *institution* whose operation demands the respecting of certain rules, just as traffic can only flow well if the conduct of each driver is regulated by a 'highway code', speed limits, a signalling system and so on, then we leave the ground of *spontaneous* hetero-regulation and come on to that of *programmed* control or hetero-regulation.

In practice, every modern society is a complex system in which sub-systems of 'communicational' self-organization, spontaneous hetero-regulation and programmed hetero-regulation interact. In the process of giving birth to gigantic technical installations and tentacular organizations, economic rationality has conferred increasing importance upon sub-systems functioning by programmed hetero-regulation: that is to say, upon administrative and industrial machineries in which individuals are induced to *function* in a complementary manner, like the parts of a machine, towards ends that are often unknown to them and *different from those offered to them as personal goals*. These ends, which are to *motivate* individuals to work towards alien goals, constitute one of the two types of regulatory instruments [*Steuerungsmedien*] which, though conflated in Habermas's work, have to be differentiated: the most important of the first type being the money, security, prestige and/or power attached to the various functions, in terms of a carefully worked out hierarchical graduation. Alongside these *incentive regulators*, *prescriptive regulators* force individuals, on pain of certain penalties, to adopt functional forms of conduct – most often laid down and formalized as proper procedure – which are demanded by the organization. Only incentive regulators ensure functional *integration*, by inducing individuals to lend themselves of their free will, to the instrumentalization of their predetermined activity.

The expansion of the larger apparatuses functioning by programmed hetero-regulation will produce an increasingly deep division within the social system. On the one hand, the mass of the population, doing increasingly specialized and predetermined work, are motivated by incentive goals that have no coherence whatever with the ultimate objectives of the organizations into which they are functionally integrated. On the other hand, a small elite of organizers attempt to ensure the co-ordination, the operating conditions and the overall regulation of organizations, determine the final objectives and structures (the organigramme) of the corresponding administrations, and define the most functional regulatory mechanisms – both incentive and prescrip-

tive. There is therefore a split between an increasingly functionalized and manipulated society and a public and private administration that is increasingly invasive; there is a rift between an ever-smaller self-regulated civil sphere and a state equipped with increasingly extensive powers of hetero-regulation as required both by the operation of the great industrial machines and the administrative and public service machines which belong to the state itself.

To this split between the auto-regulated sphere of civil society and the hetero-regulated sphere of the industrial-state megamachine, there correspond two different rationalities: the rationality of individuals pursuing ends which, even if they motivate functional patterns of conduct, are irrational in regard to the ultimate objectives of the organizations in which they work; and the rationality of these organizations which have no meaningful relation with the goals motivating the individuals involved.

This splitting of the social system and this divorce between different rationalities produces a split within the lives of individuals themselves: their professional and private lives are dominated by norms and values that are radically different from one another, if not indeed contradictory. Within large organizations, professional success requires a will to succeed according to the purely technical efficiency criteria of the functions one occupies, irrespective of content. It demands a spirit of competition and opportunism, combined with subservience towards superiors. This will be recompensed – and *compensated* – in the private sphere by a comfortable, opulent, hedonistic lifestyle. In other words, professional success becomes the *means* of achieving private comfort and pleasures that have no relation with the qualities demanded by professional life. These qualities are not connected with personal virtue, and private life is sheltered from the imperatives of professional life.

Thus it is that the private virtues of being a good father and husband, or being liked by one's neighbours, can be combined with the professional efficiency of the civil servant who moves without difficulty from serving a republic to working for a totalitarian state, or vice versa; or that the mild-mannered collector of *objets d'art* and protector of birds can work in the manufacture of pesticides or chemical weapons, and in a general way, that the high-ranking or middle manager, after putting in a day's work serving the economic values of competitiveness, productivity and technical efficiency, wants nothing more, when his work is finished, than to go home to a little haven where economic values are displaced by the love of children, animals and the countryside, or doing little jobs about the house. We shall return to this later.

Long before the creators of contemporary scientific dystopias, Max Weber thought that bureaucratization and the onward march of

machines would progress to the point where society would become a single megamachine which its human cogs 'would be forced to serve, as powerless as the fellah of Ancient Egypt. This might happen *if* a technically superior administration *were to be the ultimate and sole value* in the ordering of their affairs, and that means: a rational bureaucratic administration with the corresponding welfare benefits.' He was to equate the 'mind objectified' (*geronnener Geist*) of 'inanimate machines' with that of 'the animated machine, the bureaucratic organization, with its specialization of trained skills, its division of jurisdiction, its rules and hierarchical relations of authority.'[10] He also compared the industrial-bureaucratic machine to a 'shell of bondage' (*Gehäuse der Hörigkeit*) protecting us against insecurity and anguish, but at the cost of deprivation of meaning and freedom and a general 'dehumanization' of

> that colossal universe that is the modern economic order, founded upon the technical and economic bases of a machinist-mechanical production which, through its oppressive constraints determines now, and will continue to determine, the lifestyle of all individuals – and *not* just economically active individuals – precipitated since birth into the cogs of this machine, until the last hundredweight of fossil fuel has been used up.

'Material goods' have acquired over men

> an increasing and finally an inexorable power . . . as at no previous period in history . . . No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will rise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.'[11]

In fact, history was both to confirm and invalidate Max Weber's prophecy: the weight of bureaucracy has indeed increased, programmed hetero-regulation has become more and more dehumanizing, and the 'shell of bondage' has become at the same time increasingly constraining and increasingly comfortable. But, for precisely that reason, the system has reached a crisis point: the operation of the bureaucratic-industrial megamachine and the need to motivate its 'fellahs' to function as cogs, have confronted it with problems of regulation that are increasingly difficult to solve. No rationality and no totalizing view or vision have been able to provide it with an overall meaning, cohesion and directing goal.

Notes

1. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, New York 1968, vol. 3, p. 1394.
2. Cf. André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, London 1982, ch. 5.
3. Cf. André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, chs 8 and 9.
4. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Cambridge 1987, vol. 2, p. 117.
5. Habermas, p. 150.
6. Habermas, p. 150.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: I Theory of Practical Ensembles*, ed. Jonathan Rée, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, London 1976, p. 379.
8. Habermas, p. 150.
9. This notion is borrowed from Edgar Morin, *La Vie de la vie*, Paris 1980.
10. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 3, p. 1402 (translation modified).
11. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London/Sydney 1985, pp. 181–2.

4

From Functional Integration to Social Disintegration (And from Compensatory Consumption to the All-Embracing State)

For a long time, the revolutionary workers' movement and the socialist regimes believed they could avoid or reverse these developments. The 'collective appropriation of the means of production' would reconcile the workers with their function – and not just with their work – and prompt them *to assume that function willingly*, fully aware of its importance. Collective appropriation would cause individual goals and collective aims to coincide, the interests of each to equate with the interests of all. The collective task would become sufficiently motivating for the individual, on account of the hopes and the promise it held out for society as a whole, for personal incentive regulators – 'material incentives' or individual rewards – to become as superfluous as prescriptive regulators.

Individuals would develop a 'socialist consciousness' and with it the conviction that private and public interest were one and the same and that, by devoting themselves entirely to the task they were assigned, each would ultimately be working for her- or himself and would derive both personal fulfilment from their work and a feeling of oneness with society and the movement of history. In short, 'socialist consciousness', constituted the set of moral and intellectual qualities, by virtue of which each individual would *experience* and *desire* functional integration as a form of social integration.

In fact, the merging of functional and social integration has constantly been postulated, but it has never proved possible to achieve. For it presupposed that the definition of collective aims and the distribution and division of tasks which enabled these aims to be achieved, would be formulated first on the basis of collective decisions and agreement and, subsequently, of the self-organization of specialized sub-groups, so that each person would come to feel that they belonged both to a work

11

The Limits of Economic Rationality

Search for Meaning (3)

The problem I shall be discussing here is not of recent provenance. Marx himself used the notion of 'work' in an undifferentiated fashion, regarding the work of an industrial labourer and that of a composer or a scientist as activities of the same type. Given that view, it was quite simple for him to argue that when work had ceased to be a necessity, it would then become a human need.

However, in their efforts to demonstrate that the 'work-based society' is not on its last legs and that work is going to continue to be at the centre of our lives, the current ideologues press this view of work as an undifferentiated entity even further. The activities of the technician, the police officer, the odd-job man, the deliverer of hot croissants, the home-help, the mother, the shoe-shiner, the priest and the prostitute are all treated as 'work'. All of it, they argue, is socially useful and it all deserves remuneration in one way or another.

A text by a Finnish feminist (which is in other respects extremely interesting and opposed to the current all-pervading economism) is instructive in this regard. She writes:

> A survey carried out in Finland in 1980 showed that the average family performs 7.2 hours of unpaid work per day, seven days a week, or in other words 50.4 hours per week. Women do more than five hours of this work per day and men less than two; daughters do 1.2 hours and sons 0.7. The *monetary* value of this unpaid work is equal to 42 per cent of GNP (and 160 per cent of the national budget), a figure arrived at by taking the wages of local authority home-helps as a base . . . Economists have generally shown little interest in this invisible economy. They consider it a necessary *secondary economy*, an auxiliary to the *primary economy*, serving to reproduce labour power and to consume what has been produced.[1]

And since everything done within the framework of the family is, in the end, indispensable and socially useful, what could be more legitimate than to claim a 'decent wage' for '*all* the work' done, mainly by women, in the domestic sphere?

But where does all this work begin, and where does it end? Is domestic labour (the author uses this term and not 'domestic work' to show that she really is talking about 'production') work in the same sense as that of an industrial worker? Do people really 'work' five hours in their homes after having worked seven or eight hours outside the home? This is what Pietilä implies when she writes: 'The *monetary* value of unpaid work is equal to 42 per cent of GNP. . . . It would be much greater if it were assessed at the rate for providing the corresponding goods and services if these were bought on the market.' In other words, equity and economic logic appear to demand that everything people do be evaluated according to its *exchange value* on the market: the night the mother spends at the bedside of her sick child should then be paid at night-nurse rates; the birthday cake Grandma baked charged at the price it would cost in a confectioner's; sexual relations paid for at the rate each of the partners might get at an Eros Centre, maternity at the price charged by the surrogate mother.

And why not admit that all these unpaid bits of 'work' would deserve to be transformed into specialized, paid jobs, since this would surely solve a lot of problems? Would their social usefulness not justify such a move? The idea of 'wages for motherhood' and 'wages for housework' is becoming a fashionable one (I shall return to this later), since society could not exist without children and households. It could not exist if people stopped washing, dressing and feeding themselves properly. Are people therefore being useful to society when they do these things? Have I a right to payment if I brush my teeth three times a day and, as a result, the health service makes savings? Can we and should we regulate monetarily and administratively – in terms of demographic, economic and social optima – the 'work' of 'producing' children, of keeping clean, of looking after ourselves and our environment? Is sexual activity to be seen as part of our work because orgasms stimulate creativity in our jobs? Are the sports we play part of our work because the dynamism they give us can be of profit to the economy? And if not, then why not?

Might it be because there are things one does that are not done for the purpose of exchange, activities which, as a result, have no price, no exchange value, 'work' that has no 'utility' and which consequently merges with the satisfaction its performance procures, even if that work demands effort and fatigue? Who is to say, if these activities exist, what they might be?

Certainly not economists and sociologists. Because they start out from the functioning of the social system, they can only apprehend the functionality of individual activities, not the meaning they have for the individual subjects who perform them. They inevitably posit *the system as subject* (this is the defining characteristic of instrumental thinking) and see the living, thinking subjects as the instruments it employs. Everything, then, seems useful to the system since, in fact, it is the totalization of everything that happens. Objective thought will naively conclude that men and women (along with children, and Nature) 'work' for the system, whatever they do and that their reality resides in this 'function'. Therein lies one of the roots of totalitarianism and barbarism.

We have, then, to learn to think what we are by starting out from ourselves; we have to re-learn that we are the subjects, to learn that sociology and economics have limits, and socialization too; re-learn to *make distinctions within the notion of work* in order to avoid the error of remunerating activities that have no commercial objective and subjecting to the logic of productivity acts which are only properly consonant with their meaning if the time they take is left out of account.

It is not therefore enough merely to define the criteria on which economic rationality is based. We have to define the criteria by which we judge them to be applicable. If we are to do this, we must examine our activities more closely and ask what meaning the relations they allow us to establish with other people contain and whether these relations are compatible with economic rationality.

Economically Rational Work

Work as modern economics understands it is an activity deployed *for the purpose of commodity exchange*, an activity necessarily subject to an *accounting calculation*.[2] Workers work 'to earn a living' – that is, to obtain in exchange for work whose products have no *direct* utility *for themselves* the means to buy all the things they need that are produced by people other than themselves. This work which they sell must be performed *as efficiently as possible*, so that it can be exchanged against equal and, if possible, greater amounts of work embodied in goods and services themselves produced as efficiently as possible.

This primary objective of work in no way excludes the possibility of workers *also* taking an interest in their work or deriving pleasure or personal satisfaction from it. But these are merely secondary goals. However interesting it may be, work done for exchange on the market cannot be regarded as being of the same type as the activity of the painter, the writer, the missionary, the researcher or the revolutionary, who accept a life of privation because *the activity itself, not its exchange*

value, is their primary goal.

In order to pursue economic efficiency, it has to be possible to measure the *productivity* of labour (that is the quantity of labour per unit of product). The quantitative measurement of productivity is the only possible means of comparing performance levels and defining methods and research techniques capable of increasing productivity, in other words, the only means of *saving labour* and *gaining time.* All this is evident in the classical way in which work is carried out in industrial production. However, since the workers are wage labourers, they themselves have no interest in achieving maximum economic efficiency and do not seek to fulfil that aim. Rather it is their employer who seeks it, in *his* own interest and the interest of the enterprise, and who must then contend with the ensuing difficulties of inciting the workers to achieve higher productivity.[3]

Achieving maximum economic efficiency of labour is only in the interest of the actual workers when they are self-employed, for example, in craftwork or in the provision of services. Their labour will only be rational in economic terms if the services they provide *are qualitatively and quantitatively superior to those which people are able to provide for themselves using an equal amount of their own labour.* It will then be possible for them to charge their clients for a greater amount of labour time than they actually spend and their clients will still benefit from the exchange. This is the case where plumbers or hairdressers who provide a home service are concerned. They do what their clients would not have been able to do for themselves. Their labour enables their clients to save time and improve their quality of life. In this way, these tradespeople increase the amount of wealth society has, without valorizing any capital, by increasing the quantity and quality of skills and knowledge in circulation within it. This would be impossible were it not for the existence of a *market* which permits specialized labour, which has no use value for the person providing it, to be exchanged for money – the 'universal equivalent' of the wealth produced by the labour of society as a whole.

These remarks are all the more valid in the case of activities which combine professional know-how with highly efficient equipment which ordinary individuals cannot afford to own: with capital, in other words. Cleaning and repair services and collective catering services, amongst others, come into this category, as does mechanized and automated material production.

In short, economic rationality seems properly applicable to activities which:

(a) create use value;

(b) for exchange as commodities;

(c) in the public sphere;

(d) in a measurable amount of time, at as high a level of productivity as possible.

Contrary to what is widely held to be the case, *it is not enough for an activity to be performed for exchange on the market* (with a view to receiving remuneration) *for it to be work in the economic sense of the word.* It is essential to understand this if we are to define the limits of the economic sphere. In order to underline this point, I will now examine a number of different types of activity which are characterized by their lack of one or other of the four parameters mentioned above. These activities can be divided into two main groups:

A. activities performed for the purpose of remuneration or *commodity activities*;

B. *non-commodity activities*, for which remuneration is not – or cannot be – the primary goal.

A. Commodity Activities

1. Work in the Economic Sense as Emancipation

[(a) + (b) + (c) + (d)]

I do not intend to repeat the definition of economically rational work here. Instead I will concentrate on underlining the importance of parameters (b) (commodity exchange) and (c) (in the public sphere). The fact that an activity is the object of a commodity exchange *in the public sphere* immediately denotes it as being a socially useful activity, which creates a use value that is *socially accepted* as such. In other words, this activity corresponds to a 'trade': it has a public price and a public status, and I can get an indefinite number of clients or employers to give me money for it without having to enter into a *personal* and *private* relationship with them. In any case, these people themselves do not ask me to work for them as private individuals (as, for example, a domestic servant would be required to do) but to do a specific job under specific conditions, for a specific price.

The existence of a public contract for the sale of my labour thus designates it as being *labour in general* which is incorporated – and

incorporates me – into the system of economic and social exchange. It designates me as being a *generally* social, generally useful individual, as capable as anyone else and entitled to the same rights as they are. In other words, it designates me a *citizen*. Paid work in the public sphere therefore constitutes a factor of social insertion.

It is already possible to see here that different types of work will not bestow the same degree of dignity on those who do them, nor will they afford them the same possibilities of social insertion. The 'housewife' who gets a job in a school canteen or the farmer's daughter who goes to work in a canning factory are not simply exchanging unpaid work for similar work for a wage. They are acquiring a different social status. Previously, they 'worked' in the private sphere and their work was directed towards particular individuals by virtue of the *private*, personal bond that existed between them. Their work had no *direct* or *tangible* social utility. The unwritten family code dictated that its members should have a duty to one another, in the interests of the domestic community as a whole, and there therefore existed no space in which they ceased to belong to one another. There was, then, no question of calculating one's time and saying, 'That's my work done for now. I'm off.' Allocating 'wages for housework' to 'housewives' would change nothing in this regard.

To these women, getting a job in a canteen or factory thus meant finally being able to break free of their confinement within the private sphere and *gain access to the public sphere*. Their duties were no longer dictated by the intangible obligations of love and family membership but by the rule of law. This granted them a legal existence as *citizens*, a socially determined and codified existence which was to be matched by a private sphere sheltered from all social rules and obligations, in which each individual had sovereign possession of her or his own self.

The consequences of the social codification, regulation and determination of work are consequently far from being entirely negative. These processes mark out the limits of the private and the public spheres, confer a public, social reality on individuals (what sociologists would call an 'identity'), *define their obligations and hence consider them to be freed from them once these obligations have been fulfilled*. I am freed from my obligation to my boss or client once I have 'finished my day's work' or honoured my contract; my boss or client are free of their obligations to me once I have been paid. The commodity relations characteristic of the public sphere are exempt from private bonds and obligations. If private bonds do exist, then they preclude the existence of commodity relations.

We come here to a point we shall have to tackle from a number of different angles: commodity relations cannot exist between members of

a family or a community – or that community will be dissolved; nor can affection, tenderness and sympathy be bought or sold except when they are reduced to mere simulacra.

What is important to bear in mind here is that the existence of a public, economic sphere has enabled personal relations to develop in their own right and become independent of that sphere: the *oikos*, that is, the sphere of private life and personal relations, now only marginally constitutes a sphere of economic production. *The right to accede to the public, economic sphere through one's work is a necessary part of the right to citizenship.*

2. *Servants' Work*

$$[(b) + (c) + (d)]^4$$

Services which do not *create* any use value, whilst still being the subjects of public commodity exchanges, are essentially servile jobs or servants' jobs. The job of a shoeshiner falls into this category as it entails selling a service which the client could have quite easily provided for himself in less than the amount of time he spends sitting watching the person crouching at his feet. He is not paying for the usefulness of the service provided but for the pleasure of having someone serve him.

The same goes for people paid by others – either directly or through service companies – to do their housework, even though the latter lack neither the time nor the physical ability to do it themselves. The work cleaners do does not, therefore, produce more free time across the whole of society nor is it an improvement on the result their clients could obtain if the latter did such work themselves. These servants merely enable their clients to gain a couple of hours by doing a couple of hours' work in their place.

There can be an *indirect* economic rationality for such work if the time these servants save for their employers is used by the latter to perform activities which are much more socially or economically useful than the activities the servants would be capable of performing. *But this is never entirely the case.*

For one thing, the work of a servant prevents the person doing it from demonstrating, acquiring or developing more advanced skills. The humble social status to which such people are confined conceals this fact and serves as a pretext for attributing the humble nature of their work to their inherent inferiority. There was no problem in doing this in times when servants were recruited from the ranks of oppressed classes or races; it becomes rather more difficult when they have A-levels or a degree.

For another thing, servants never serve their master or client in his or her purely public capacity (as a head of state's chauffeur does, for example). They also serve their master in her or his private life, for his or her own private comfort. They are paid, in part at least, to please a particular individual and not merely because they are economically useful. In other words, their work *does not fall entirely within the public sphere*: it consists not just in supplying a certain amount of labour at a certain price as stated in their contract, but also in giving pleasure, in giving of themselves. This relationship of servility remains concealed whilst there exists a work contract regulated by law or whilst the work is done in public (as in the case of shoeshiners or those who work providing pleasurable services). It is exposed when servants are paid for the pleasure they procure for their masters in private. I shall return to this in connection with prostitution.

3. *Functions, Care, Assistance*

$$[(a) + (b) + (c)]^5$$

Under this heading I shall group those activities which create use value, for the purpose of commodity exchange, in the public sphere, but whose productivity is impossible to measure and hence impossible to maximize.

We are obviously dealing here primarily with the monitoring, controlling and maintenance jobs described in Chapter 7. They are comparable, as Oskar Negt has so accurately observed, to the 'work' of police officers, firemen, tax officials, fraud-squad officers, and so on: these are people who are *on duty* but are not *working*: their task is to intervene should the need arise but it would be better if it did not, and ultimately they perform their function best when they have nothing to do. These activities are therefore not jobs but functions for which 'functionaries' are paid for the hours they are present. Better to have too many employees with relatively little to do than a small workforce which would be unable to cope in the case of an emergency or a serious difficulty. One could undoubtedly argue that the size of this workforce is determined all the same by a calculation and therefore corresponds to a form of economic rationality. However, this argument is not relevant to our concern here, which is the applicability of economic rationality to a determinate *activity* (or type of work). The paradox, in so far as these functions are concerned, is that *economic rationality at the level of the system requires that economic rationalization should not be applied to the activities of its agents.* They have to be paid independently of their productivity.

The reason for this is not simply that the amount of effective work cannot be planned and does not therefore depend on the agents themselves: *these agents must not have an interest in there being work for them to do.* The fireman should not have an interest in there being a fire, nor the police officer in there being public disorder, nor the inspector in there being frauds, nor the doctor on night duty in there being an emergency. They should be incorruptible, disinterested, loyal and just – like the idealized cop of American cinema – and act 'out of a sense of duty', in the interest of the system or the general public, not in their own interest or that of their professional body.

The same also holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for all those activities which meet a need for care, assistance or help. The efficiency of such activities is impossible to quantify. Not only because the nature and number of demands for assistance are independent of the people providing care or assistance but because the reasons for these demands are impossible to plan. A doctor's productivity cannot be measured in terms of the number of patients she or he sees per day; nor that of a home-help in terms of the number of disabled people's houses he or she cleans; nor that of a childminder in terms of the number of children in her or his care, and so on. It is possible for the efficiency of 'carers' to be in inverse proportion to their visible quantitative output.

The service they provide cannot be defined *in itself* independently of the people whose individual needs they cater for. The point is not, as in manufacturing work, to produce predetermined acts or objects, which can be separated from the actual person producing them but to define the acts or objects to be produced according to other people's needs. Adjusting supply to suit demand, in other words, depends on a person-to-person relationship, not on the execution of predetermined, quantifiable actions.

The perverse effects produced by the quantification of caring activities are particularly striking in the case of the French or German health systems. By introducing a system of productivity-related remuneration for GPs, the French system of 'payment by treatment'[6] has created a double barrier between doctors and patients:

(i) If the treatments doctors provide are to be made quantifiable they must be made to correspond to a standard definition. This a priori definition (what medical insurance schemes call 'nomenclature') presupposes a standard definition of needs and, therefore, the standardization of patients. Patients have to correspond to predictable 'cases' that slot readily into a classification table. The GP's first task will thus be to classify the patient: individual consultations and examinations are

abandoned in favour or radiography and laboratory tests, advice and explanations are replaced by prescriptions, and so forth. The doctor–patient relationship gives way to a purely technical relationship. The consumption of medical services and pharmaceutical products increases and so does the patients' frustration.

(ii) 'Payment by treatment' acts as an incentive for the doctor to maximize his or her gains by maximizing productivity (that is, the number of patients treated per hour). Now, the slightest suspicion that the primary objective of the persons administering care is to maximize their gains has the effect of undermining the relationship between doctors and patients (or between teachers and pupils or between carers and those in their care) and casts doubt on the quality of the assistance they are providing. This assistance should, in fact, be provided *in the patient's interest, not the GP's.* This is the very essence of the doctor–patient relationship (or teacher–pupil relationship, etc.), and is a condition of its effectiveness. Persons administering care must not have a personal interest in people needing their care. The money they earn should be a *means* of exercising their profession and not its end. Somehow, earning their living should not, so to speak, come into the bargain.

The same goes for all the other caring and educational professions. These jobs are only done well when they are performed out of a 'sense of vocation', that is, an *unconditional* desire to help other people. Receiving remuneration for the help she or he gives should not be the doctor's basic motivation; such a motivation is in competition with a strictly professional motivation which could or indeed must take precedence in case of need. In the occupations in question, the relationship between doctors and patients (or between teachers and pupils or between carers and those in their care) is *distinct from their commercial relationship and is presented as quite independent of it*: 'I'm here to help you. Of course, I also intend to earn a living. But money is what enables me to do my job and not vice versa. What I do and what I earn have no real relation to one other.'[7]

The patients (or pupils, and so on) recognize this incommensurability by the fact that they still feel indebted to their doctor (or teacher, etc.) even after they have paid them. They have received from the latter something greater than, and different from, what money can buy: the service provided, even when it is well remunerated, *also* is of the nature of a *gift*, more precisely, a giving *of him or herself* on the part of the doctor (or teacher, etc.). She or he has been involved in the service he or she has provided in a manner that can be neither *produced* at will, nor

bought, learned or codified. She or he has shown an interest in the other person as a human being and not just in their money; he or she has established a relationship with the other that cannot be expressed in terms of a predefined technical procedure or a computer programme. This relationship will have a tendency to extend beyond the public sphere into the private, that is, into relationships governed not by social conventions, rules and norms that are generally held to be valid, but by a personal understanding gradually built up between two individuals and valid for them alone.

Because they demand that one give of oneself, only people who have chosen to perform helping and caring activities do them well. Such activities are best carried out by volunteers. In a society in which time and skills are no longer in short supply, these activities can be developed, then, in ways that are totally different from current conceptions. The current conception of such activities is still based on the idea that work for economic ends has to take up the most important part of our lives and that, in consequence, the so-called 'convivial' activities such as the provision of home help and home care (for the handicapped, the aged, the sick, and mothers with young children) constitute a 'sector' apart which can serve to provide unemployed young people with low-paid, part-time jobs, until something better comes along. It is thus that the 'convivial sector' – a phrase coined by a certain French minister for social affairs – came into being; and that a new dividing line was established in that process of compartmentalization of the spheres of life which Max Weber warned us against: on the one side specialists in heartless professions, on the other specialists in soulless conviviality. 'Conviviality' would be turned into a low-grade occupation and those who had 'proper' jobs would be all the less obliged to engage in it.

Now in a society in which time and producible resources are no longer scarce, the opposite of the above is to be expected: convivial activities could be gradually de-professionalized and, as the number of working hours diminishes, done on a voluntary basis within the framework of mutual aid networks. These voluntary activities would become *one* of the focuses of a multi-faceted life, alongside paid work (twenty to thirty hours per week) and other non-economic activities, such as cultural and educational activities, maintaining and renovating our surroundings, and so on.

We must rethink all the activities which require us to give of ourselves with a view to developing self-organized, voluntary services. The impasses with which the welfare state has to contend originate in part in the absurd conception of society which requires one sector of the population (people who have retired or been pensioned off early) to be paid

to be inactive; another sector to be paid to work long hours; and a third to be paid to perform, on a temporary basis and for want of something better, what the first have no right, and the second no time, to do. If we continue in this manner, in the twenty-first century (by about 2030) there will be approximately the same number of pensioners as people in employment. By the time they retire, they will have done about thirty years' paid work and will still have about twenty to twenty-five years ahead of them in which they will be able to carry on working, and will in general wish to do so. The entire social organization of non-economic activities (such as helping, caring, cultural and development activities) should be redefined on the basis of these facts, by creating a kind of *synergy* within a two-tiered system supported on the one hand by centralized services provided by institutions, and on the other by self-organized, co-operative services staffed by volunteers.[8]

Having analysed those activities which allow people to give of themselves, we can now turn our attention to activities in which, paradoxically, it is precisely this giving of oneself which is the object of a commodity exchange. I give myself or give of myself so that I can earn money; I give this act a monetary value and thus negate it, yet I am nevertheless still bound to perform it as a gift. Such commodity exchanges, which bear upon what I *am* and cannot possibly produce at will, are forms of prostitution. They establish a commodity relationship between private persons relating to each other as unique individuals, and are performed in the *private* sphere.

4. *Prostitution*

$$[(a) + (b) + (d)]^{9}$$

The prostitute undertakes to provide a determinate form of pleasure within a determinate period of time. The client cannot obtain an equivalent, in terms of quality and quantity, of the service the prostitute sells from unpaid partners in so short a time. There is, therefore, a use value created. However, there is an obvious contradiction between the sale of such a service and its nature.

In commodity exchange, buyer and seller enter into a contractual relationship for a set period of time; they are free from their obligations to each other once payment has been made; the offer made by the seller determines the buyer as an anonymous individual, interchangeable with any other: having the requisite amount of money is the necessary and sufficient condition for receiving the service. Now, in the case of prostitution, the client presents himself as a buyer whose money is sufficient to give him the right to request and obtain from the prostitute a service which he expects to *define himself*, for the sole reason that he wants that service.

Of course, the commodity exchange is conducted at an agreed price but this price depends on the personality of the client and on the nature of the service he asks for. The commercial transaction thus takes place entirely in the private sphere and relates to the provision of a personal service which is adapted to meet a demand that is made on a personal, private basis.

We are dealing here with a servant–master relationship in its purest form: *one person's 'work' IS another person's pleasure.* Work, here, has no object other than to produce this pleasure. The client's pleasure consists in consuming the work done on his or her private person. This consumption is immediate and direct. It is not mediated by any product whatsoever. It is this immediacy which distinguishes pleasure procured through servile labour from, for example, the pleasure a head chef procures for those who consume his 'sublime creations'.

But there is more to it than that. There *is no reason* behind the client's desire for this pleasure. This is one of the major differences between the 'work' of a prostitute and, for example, that of physiotherapist. The latter also attends to the physical well-being of her clients, but the clients have to have a motive for demanding her services. This motive will then become the subject of a diagnosis, after which the therapist will use her sovereign judgement to determine a form of treatment which, though personalized, employs well-defined techniques according to a predetermined procedure.

Whilst the 'carer' is, then, in the client's service, this in no way makes her the latter's instrument of pleasure. On the contrary, the 'carer' is in a position of dominance: she decides what the nature of the operations carried out will be and does not give of herself except *within the limits of a codified procedure which she controls from start to finish.* The technical nature of the procedure acts as an insurmountable barrier: it prevents the therapist's personal implication in the task from developing into complete complicity or intimacy.

The situation is exactly the reverse in the 'work' of the prostitute: her technical know-how must be deployed in the way the client desires (without having to give a reason). What the client hopes to buy is the prostitute's complete implication in the acts he demands: she must submit to his demands *by putting herself into her work* and not by performing these tasks mechanically. She must be both subject and freedom, but a freedom which can do no other than to make itself the instrument of another person's will. In other words, she must be that

contradicatory, impossible, phantasmatic being, the 'beautiful slave' (whom the young prince receives as a present in *The Arabian Nights*, riding naked on a white horse); the slave who uses all her intelligence and sensibility freely to carry out her master's desires and who is *free to do only this*; the slave who, in reality, is never anything but someone playing at being the phantasmatic being who haunts her master's thoughts.

'Pay your money and you can do what you like with me.' This short phrase says it all: the prostitute posits herself as a sovereign subject in order to demand payment and as soon as this demand is met, she renounces her sovereignty and changes into the instrument of the payer. She thus asserts herself as a free subject who is going to play the role of a slave. Her service will be a simulation; she makes no secret of this. In any case, the client is well aware of it. He knows he cannot buy true feelings, real involvement. He buys simulated versions of them. And in the end what he demands is that the simulation should be more real than the real thing, that it should allow him to experience a venal relationship in his imagination as if it were a real one.

Technicity is thus reintroduced into this venal relationship under another guise and in another manner: in the prostitute's mastery of the art of simulation. The acts she proposes are divorced from their implied intention: their function is to give the illusion of an intention or implication that do not actually exist. They are *gestures* – gestures performed with masterful skill which simulate a *giving of oneself*. The technical practices of simulation thus enable the prostitute to refrain from implicating herself in a relationship which signifies total involvement: she effectively absents herself from this relationship; she ceases to inhabit her body, her gestures, her words at the moment of offering them. She offers her body as if it were not her own self, as an instrument from which she is detached.

She convinces the client she is selling *herself* and convinces herself it is *not* herself *she* is selling. The 'I' of the proposition, 'I sell myself', posits itself as someone other than the 'myself'.[10]

Now, unlike all the other servants whose jobs entail professionally simulating deep concern, good humour, sincerity, sympathy and so on, the prostitute cannot reduce the services she provides to the ritual play of gestures and set phrases which characterize the commercial forms of servility, friendliness and devotion. Over and above offering of herself the gestures and words which she is able to *perform* without involving herself in them, she offers of herself what she *is* beyond all simulation: her body, that is, that through which the subject is given to itself, and which, without any possible dissociation, constitutes the ground of all its lived experiences. You cannot surrender your body without surrendering *yourself* or let it be used by other people without being humiliated.

For 'sexual services' to become a commercial service like any other, they would have to be reduced to a sequence of technicized and standardized acts which anyone could perform on anyone else, according to a predetermined procedure, without having to surrender *themselves* physically. Only then could 'sex' become the rationalized 'work' someone would do to give someone else an orgasm, following a codifiable technique comparable to a form of medical 'treatment', without there being a (real or simulated) giving of themselves or intimacy.

This is more or less what one feminist writer proposed in a long article published in Germany in 1987. According to her, there is a positive side to AIDS in the sense that it has revealed the merits of those orgasms obtained by other means than sexual penetration, which would justify women refusing 'coital men' and establishing sexual relationships based on the much more rational and hygienic act of masturbation, whose technical subtleties have, according to the author, been mistakenly ignored until now.

The logical development of this process of technization would seem to be the introduction of mechanical masturbation using copulating machines. It would permit 'sex' to be rationalized by entirely abolishing the sphere of intimacy. Individuals would no longer need to belong to each other: mechanized humans would be mirrored by humanized machines; orgasms could be bought and sold in the public sphere in the same way as live, hard porn shows.[11]

Two points emerge from the preceding analysis:

(i) There are acts we cannot *perform* at will or on demand and which can only be sold as simulations. These are the necessarily private relational acts through which one person participates in another's feelings – for example, sympathy, understanding, affection or tenderness – and causes the latter to exist as an absolutely unique subject. Such relationships are by nature private and, moreover, resistant to all measures designed to improve their productivity.

(ii) There is an inalienable dimension of our existence, the enjoyment of which we cannot sell to anyone else without *giving of ourselves* into the bargain, and the sale of which devalues the act of giving without relieving us of the obligation to perform it as a gift. This is the essential paradox of prostitution, that is, of all forms of selling *oneself* and renting *oneself* out.

Obviously, prostitution is not limited to 'sexual services'. Every time we let someone buy for their own use what we *are* and could not possibly *produce* at will using technical skill – the renown and talent of the venal writer or the surrogate mother's womb, for instance – we are engaging in acts of prostitution.

The case of the surrogate mother merits closer study. It should enable us to clarify the possible implications of a specific public allowance paid to mothers *in recognition of the social and economic utility* of their 'maternal function'.

4a. Maternity, the Maternal Function, Surrogate Mothers

There is no possible comparison between the social function of motherhood and its lived meaning. For every woman, pregnancy freely consented to or freely chosen is the absolutely unique experience of a life from within herself desiring to become other while continuing to be part of herself. Once born of her, that life which has become other will still need to be *given to itself*. For this is what bringing up a child means: assisting a life, which is at first still intimately linked to the body of its mother, to detach itself from that body; to take control of itself; to become an autonomous subject.

The relation of a mother to *her* child is therefore not a social relation, no more than the life of the small child is something social. To be a mother is to protect, cherish and raise not just *a* baby, but precisely that baby which is not interchangeable with any other, not merely because it came from her body, but because being its mother means experiencing the absolute certainty that it is *for itself* that incomparably and ineffably unique centre of reference we call a subject. To wish that a subject be itself, to grant it the right to be itself is the essence of the love relation. Maternal love is one of its forms.

It is, however, true that, from the point of view of the social system, maternity is also a 'function' which women absolutely must perform if society is to perpetuate itself. The conflict between these two things is, therefore, radical. The mother's body initially shields the baby from the clutches of society. And, to the extent that maternal love reveals the child to itself as an absolutely unique subject *with a right to its own uniqueness*, it is not merely the maternal body but the maternal relation to the child that threatens the survival of society.[12]

Indeed, from the point of view of the social system, mothers possess an exorbitant power which challenges society's rights over its (future) citizens. Society therefore does everything it can to limit and restrain women's power over their children, and also to appropriate and

subjugate women themselves by depriving them of rights over their own bodies, their lives, their very selves. This is the fundamental cause of women's oppression. The 'socialization of the maternal function' will only resolve the radical conflict between society and women if the former manages to produce children without need to have recourse to the bodies of the latter; or if women accept having the childbearing function detached from their persons and allow society to use their wombs for its own ends and pay them for the privilege.[13]

It is, therefore, upon the relation of women to their bodies and their relation to motherhood and their children that the possibility or otherwise of a monetary and/or administrative regulation of procreation depends; that is to say, the possibility or impossibility of commercial and/or social and political eugenics. The issue of how we conceive the remuneration of the maternal function raises, then, the more fundamental question of what kind of civilization we want to live in.

A specific social allowance paid to mothers has a fundamentally different meaning depending on whether it is conceived in the interests of the mother or in the interests of society.

(i) In the former case, the allowance sets the seal upon a woman's sovereign right to be a mother and to raise her child in complete independence, without being accountable to anyone. The question in that case is not what use the mother is to society, but what use society is to the mother and her child. Motherhood is understood as an autonomous undertaking whose possible outcome will be the child's acquisition of autonomy: the mother is allowed to make the child a sovereign subject; its upbringing can be a process of *giving the child to itself*.

(ii) In the latter case, the allowance is granted to the woman by virtue of the socially useful function she performs by *giving society* the children it needs. The mother may then be rewarded, honoured and decorated for the accomplishment of her duty as childbearer, which in this case is regarded virtually as a form of work (in most countries, she has also been honoured as a 'heroic mother' if all her children are killed in a war). It is no longer her personal self-fulfilment, nor the personal self-realization of the child that counts, but the service rendered to the nation.

In this latter case, the mother therefore loses both her sovereign rights over her children and her rights over her own self. If she fails to fulfil the obligations society prescribes for her, she may be deprived of her rights as a mother. She is socialized and colonized to the depths of her very being and remains what patriarchal societies have always wanted her to

be: a humble body which societies use for their own ends.

A 'wage for motherhood' instituted in the name of 'the social usefulness of the maternal function' therefore introduces the idea that a woman may become the equivalent of a surrogate mother for society. The state may rent her womb in order to get its supply of children. And once it is social usefulness that counts, the socialization of the reproductive function can be taken a very long way. In effect, the surrogate mother rents herself out to bear a child which is not, genetically, her own. If one accepts this principle, there is nothing scandalous about envisaging the same service being provided not to individuals but to the state; in other words, in envisaging that the childbearing function may become specialized and professionalized along eugenic lines. Women with sturdy constitutions would then be paid for developing within their bodies embryos provided by genetic banks, and for giving birth to children bearing the genetic characteristics that were most useful to the system.

This resembles Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, but it also resembles the practices of the Third Reich: women whose progeniture would not fit in with the eugenic norms were there prevented (by sterilization) from becoming mothers; by contrast, procreation was encouraged in the *Lebensborne* ('fountains of life') where young women of Nordic type were impregnated by young SS men so as to provide the Reich and the Führer with the future racial elite. The children born in these procreation centres never knew their parents.

We have to choose, then, on what basis we demand a specific social allowance for mothers. If this is done in the name of the emancipation of women, we cannot *also* invoke the social usefulness of the maternal function (and vice versa). Rather than providing the feminist cause with a more solid foundation, the social usefulness argument only serves to weaken it unnecessarily. A woman's right to be (or not to be) a mother has no need, in fact, of any supplementary justification: it derives its legitimacy from the inalienable rights of the human person to dispose of itself in a sovereign manner. The granting of a specific and sufficient social income to mothers derives from the same principles as the *unconditional* social protection of the integrity of persons and their health and freedom. It has nothing to do with their economic profitability or their social utility.

The same goes for the creation of day nurseries and nursery schools. The fact that they are necessary for women's emancipation is a sufficient reason for having them: they make women's personal growth as mothers compatible with their personal growth as citizens (and vice versa). They do not require any economic justification.

B. Non-commodity Activities

The preceding analyses are concerned exclusively with activities performed for commodity exchange. They demonstrate that not all paid activities are 'work' in the same sense of the word. And they cannot all meet the same criteria of rationality, nor can they all be equally included, *a fortiori*, in the economic sphere.

The female worker does not work in the same sense as the maid, nor the 'carer', the prostitute or the fireman in the same sense as the worker. There can be no society, no life, without 'work', but not all societies and lives are based on work. Work and the work-based society are not in crisis because there is not enough *to do*, but because *work in a very precise sense* has become scarce, and the work that is to done now falls less and less into that particular category.

The crisis of work and of the work-based society will not be overcome by an increase in the number of shoeshiners, as George Gilder[14] believes, nor by a rise in the number of domestic servants, hostesses and service-station attendants as Philippe Séguin[15] maintains, nor by an increase in the number of prostitutes, housewives/husbands, tourist guides or theme-park personnel. Not that all these people do not 'work'; but what they do does not have the same meaning as work in the economic sense and there are certain dangers in putting their activities in the same category as the latter.

It is true that 'work' has not always had the meaning it has assumed in work-based societies. In particular, it has not always been an activity performed for commodity exchange, in the public sphere. Nor has it always been a source of citizenship for the 'workers'. On the contrary, in ancient Greece it was considered incompatible with citizenship. This was because the greater part of the production of life's necessities was performed in the private domestic sphere (the *oikos*). Until the birth of capitalism, there was no public economic sphere in today's sense. The members of the household produced their food, their thread, their cloth, their clothing and their fuel. They did not count their time. Indeed, they did not know how to calculate, and they lived by two clear and obvious precepts: 'it takes as long as it takes' and 'enough is sufficient'.

The production of that use value of which we are ourselves both the originators and the sole beneficiaries I shall term *work-for-oneself*. It is one of the two principal forms of non-commodity activity. I shall examine the ambivalent meaning it still has today, and then go on to deal with *autonomous activities*, activities which are neither necessary nor useful and which constitute an end in themselves.

1. *Work-for-oneself*

In the industrialized societies today, all that subsists of such work-for-oneself are activities of self-maintenance: washing, dressing, doing the washing and the washing-up, housework, shopping, washing and feeding children and putting them to bed. Work-for-oneself has been reduced to 'chores', that is, to those activities which are not only not *destined* for commodity exchange, but which are not even *exchangeable*. The results of these activities are ephemeral, being consumed as soon as they are produced; they cannot be stocked; they have to be begun again day after day; they are of no use to anyone else. The whole of domestic production, on the other hand, that work-for-oneself that is '*poietic*', has been transferred from the private sphere to the public, industrial, market-oriented economic sphere. The question facing us, then, is the following: can this transfer continue, must it continue until work-for-oneself is completely eliminated?

I will examine this question from a number of angles, firstly dealing with the household as an indivisible unit and then returning to the relations between the individuals of whom it may consist.

The tendency for work done for oneself to be transferred to industrialized production and external services is regarded in the dominant economic thinking as still having a long way to go before it has fully exhausted its potential. You can replace shopping by ordering goods on Prestel and having them delivered to your door, while the need to cook can be replaced by a hot-meals delivery service. Housework can be done by teams of professional cleaners, going from house to house while the occupants are out, until such time as they themselves are replaced by programmable domestic robots. Children can be looked after from a very early age by professional childminders in nurseries which also operate at night. Hygiene and bodily care can also, in large part, be provided by professional services available in each block, run on the lines of gymnasiums, health and fitness centres or beauty parlours: each resident would submit their body to the attention of these services in the morning or evening – or both. And so on and so forth. According to the economists of the employers' organizations, there are very considerable 'untapped residues of employment' in these areas.[16]

The sense of unease this type of projection generates results from its confusion about the objective being pursued. That objective is not at all the same as it was in the heroic age of capitalist or socialist industrialization. The point then was to try to reduce the time women and men devoted to domestic tasks, in order to employ that time, at a far higher rate of productivity, in industry and collective undertakings. Hence, in

Israeli kibbutzim or in Chinese popular communes, the whole range of household tasks was socialized: communal cooking, meals eaten together in the refectory; children looked after night and day in the 'Children's Block' (except in the evenings, when they could spend an hour or two with their parents); washing and mending done in the communal wash-house/linen-room. The general object was to have people 'work' less at home for themselves, so that they could work more for the collectivity (or, in capitalist society, for their employers). The socialization and industrialization (of the production of bread, cloth and clothing, of washing and mothering/child-rearing) were intended to save time *across the whole of society* and allow that time to be redeployed in the economic sphere.

Now, in the present conditions, the externalisation of domestic tasks is directed towards the opposite goal. The point is no longer to socialize household tasks so that they absorb less time *across the whole of society*. It is now the quite contrary object that is being pursued. The idea is that these tasks *should occupy the greatest number of people and absorb as much working time as possible, but in the form, in this instance, of commercial services*. This is because it is no longer labour that is scarce, but paid jobs. Now more hours of paid work are to be devoted to domestic tasks than they would actually take up if everyone did them for themselves. 'Making work', 'creating jobs': these are the goals of the new tertiary anti-economy.

The army of cleaners, waitresses, waiters, cooks, kitchen-hands and delivery men and women called upon to do our housework, cooking and shopping and to deliver hot meals to our homes take no less time (if we take into account the working hours accumulated in the installations and equipment involved) than we ourselves would if we were to do the things they do for us. The time they gain for us is not productive time, but time for consumption and comfort. They are not working to serve collective interests, but to serve us as individuals, and to give us private pleasure. Their work is our pleasure. Our pleasure 'gives them work' which we consume directly; this is the defining characteristic (as we have seen in the case of prostitution) of servile labour.

Philippe Séguin openly acknowledged this fact when he wrote, 'In the future, quality of service will be more sought after than mere productivity. I am convinced that, as styles of consumption develop, the consumer will be prepared to pay a higher price to obtain a better service.'[17] And we find a similar argument in a pamphlet published by the CFDT:

> Providing services that are intended to substitute for those forms of self-production which households are often forced into for want of the supply

> of appropriate services is also a plus for employment. We might cite as an example the services which enable those women who wish to (sic) to be relieved of a part of the domestic tasks which still fall most heavily on them.[18]

It seems, in this model, to be merely a question of supply. If 'consumers' do not buy more services, and services of a better quality, it is because these are not being supplied. If households 'are forced into' doing their own cooking, shopping and housework, this comes about because of a 'want of the supply of appropriate services'. If only this supply existed, women 'who wish to' could be relieved of their drudgery and a plethora of 'jobs' would be created. But *who are* the women who might 'wish' to be relieved of this drudgery? *On to whom* might they unload these tasks? In what conditions are people prepared to do other people's housework? *Who* pays them, and *with what* and how much?

The abstract categories of macro-economic reasoning make it possible to evade this kind of question, and with it the question of whether the cleaners, hot-pizza delivery boys, messengers and service-station attendants are also 'prepared to pay a higher price' for these services, whether they too can afford to transfer their domestic tasks to yet other service workers, to have themselves served hot meals at home after work. The ideology of jobs for jobs' sake produces the same kinds of nonsense as neo-liberal 'supply-side economics'.

We must therefore restate an obvious point: to pay someone else to do two hours 'housework' in my stead, work which I could just as easily do myself, it has to be the case that two hours of *my* work earn me more than two hours of *her or his* work earn for the worker. Otherwise, I will find myself in the same position as the two mothers who pay one another to look after each other's children and I will be better off working two hours less (unpaid) and doing my housework myself. *The development of personal services is therefore only possible in a context of growing social inequality, in which one part of the population monopolizes the well-paid activities and forces the other part into the role of servants.* We can see here a South-Africanisation of society, that is, the realization of the colonial model within the metropolitan heartland. We can also see what a German sociologist has called 'housewifization',[19] that is, the transferring of what was traditionally regarded as 'housewife's work' to an economically and socially marginalized mass of people.

The professionalization of domestic tasks is therefore the very antithesis of a liberation. It relieves a privileged minority of all or part of their work-for-themselves and makes that work the sole source of livelihood for a new class of underpaid servants, who are *forced to take on other peoples' domestic tasks alongside their own.*[20]

Thus a completely absurd social division of labour is established. One section of the population is so fully occupied in the economic sphere that it does not have time for its domestic chores; the other is forced to take on the domestic chores of those people who, by their devotion to work, prevent them from finding a more interesting job. Only an obstinate clinging to the ideology of work prevents the advocates of this model from seeing that *if everyone worked less, everyone could do their own domestic tasks AND earn their living by working.* I am not suggesting that the length of the working day can be reduced overnight, by two hours a day for example. What I am saying is that a staged reduction, without loss of real income, could eventually go much further than two hours a day as the productivity of the economy increased, and that this is essentially a political question.[21] That question concerns the kind of society we wish to create: one in which everyone performs for themselves, in their own time, the tasks that lie within their private sphere, or one in which, in the name of the ideology of jobs for jobs' sake, a pattern of life is promoted in which those who work in the economic sphere are dissuaded from doing anything whatever by and for themselves.

This latter option would have the effect of creating a dominant pattern of life (proposed by the cultural and leisure industries and directed, to the envy of all the rest, at the richest 20 per cent of the population) in which only two types of activity remained, those which were performed only to earn money and those (games, shows, tourism, therapies, sports requiring expensive equipment) to which money alone could give access. In this model, the majority of the population would be professionally specialized in handling a particular aspect of other people's lives and would in turn have most of the aspects of their own lives taken care of professionally. The economy (or, rather, anti-economy) founded on the proliferation of personal services would thus bring about universal dependence and heteronomy and define as 'poor' those people who were 'forced', at least to some extent, to take care of their own needs for themselves.

Now, this model is fundamentally out of step with the aspirations individuals actually develop when time and resources cease to be scarce. Developments within the kibbutzim are instructive in this regard. As a relative degree of abundance was achieved, families developed a tendency to take back themselves an increasing share of the 'chores' of which they had been relieved by the collective services. Work-for-oneself ceased to be regarded solely as an imposition; in certain respects, it became a need and a means of winning back a greater degree of personal sovereignty in the form of a greater sense of self-belonging within the private sphere. Parents demanded the right to spend

more time with their children, insisted on keeping them with them all night, and criticized the staff who looked after them. The boundary line between the time domestic tasks *took* from one and the time one *gave* to them became blurred. People began to *prefer* taking on certain tasks themselves – and not only such jobs as looking after babies, in which it is impossible to distinguish the element of 'chore' (washing, changing, feeding) from the emotional relationship and from play, but also such things as looking after personal objects, which only really belong to you if you maintain, use and tinker with them yourself.

The fact is that work-for-oneself plays an essential role in the creation and demarcation of a private sphere. The latter cannot exist without the former. You can see this very clearly when all the jobs in the domestic sphere are taken over by external services: you cease to be 'at home' in your own house. The spatial organization of the dwelling, the nature, form and arrangement of familiar objects have to be adapted to the routine attentions of service staff or robots, as they are in hotels, barracks and boarding schools. Your immediate environment ceases to belong to you, in much the same way as the chauffeur-driven car comes to belong more to the chauffeur than to the owner.

Every act of appropriation – even the appropriation of one's own body – requires 'work' (in the sense of '*ergon*', the expenditure of energy) and time. Work-for-oneself is, basically, *what we have to do to take possession of ourselves* and of that arrangement of objects which, as both extension of ourselves and mirror of our bodily existence, forms our niche within the sensory world, our private sphere.

The problem which faces those societies where time has ceased to be scarce is therefore quite the opposite of the one to which the model of the 'electronic dwelling' and the total transfer of work to professional services provides an answer. The important thing there – and this runs quite counter to that model – is to extend the scope of the work-for-oneself through which persons come to belong to themselves, through which they come to belong to one another in their communities or families and through which each person comes to be rooted in the sensory materiality of the world and to share that world with others.

'Work-for-oneself' does not have to be limited to what you do for yourself, nor the 'private sphere' to the intimate space that belongs to you alone. I am 'at home' not only in the room or corner I inhabit, the place where I keep my personal possessions, but also in the familiar space (house, courtyard, street, neighbourhood or village) that I share with other persons or private communities. Or rather I am at home in this common convivial space so long as I participate in its development, its organization and its maintenance in voluntary co-operation with other users. Work 'for oneself' then finds its natural extension in work

'for ourselves', just as the community of the family finds an extension in the informal co-operative that provides immediate services and in the informal associations of mutual aid between neighbours.

All this clearly presupposes styles of architecture and town planning which make it easy to meet and interact, and which encourage shared use and common initiatives and lend themselves generally to the reappropriation of the immediate environment by those who live in it; these are all things which are more highly developed in Scandinavia than in other countries, on account of the existence there of co-operatives for the self-management of apartment blocks. The trend there is for each building to be equipped with a sauna, a workshop/repair-shop, a cafeteria, a games room for children, a crèche, a room for the handicapped and so on. For the aged, a dispensary, a communal kitchen, a refectory and a meals-on-wheels service are provided by volunteers (most of whom are also old) from among their fellow tenants and/or by social workers whom the local authority places at the disposal of the residents where this is requested.

If a general meeting so decides, co-operative activities may also extend to the creation by the residents of an organic kitchen garden alongside the building or to the construction of a playground or adventure playground, to the setting up of a consumer co-operative and a barter market for clothing, household implements and toys, to mutual aid in case of illness, bereavement or personal problems and to the organization of evening classes or parties.

Each tenant may choose either to use the self-organized services or the more anonymous ones provided by the local authority. The former are not designed to compensate for the shortcomings of the latter, but to shape them and orient them in a decentralized manner, towards needs defined by the residents themselves.[22]

What we have here is the synergy of voluntary activities and institutional services which I mentioned above with reference to helping and caring activities.

The grassroots community can thus become the intermediate micro-social space between the private and the public, macro-social spaces. It can protect individuals from becoming isolated, lonely and withdrawn. It can *open up* the private sphere on to a space of *common sovereignty*, shielded from commodity relations, where individuals *together* determine for themselves their common needs, and decide the most appropriate actions for satisfying them. It is at this level that individuals can (once again) become masters of their own destinies, their own way of life, the content and scope of their desires or needs and the extent of the efforts they are prepared to put in to meet them. It is in this practical experience of micro-social activities that a critique of the

capitalist consumption model and of social relations dominated by economic objectives and commodity exchange can be anchored.[23] It is at this level, in fact, that social bonds of solidarity and living co-operation can be formed and that we can have direct experience of that perfect reciprocity of rights and duties that is entailed in *belonging* to a collective: the rights it accords me are the duties it accepts towards me as a member, but being a member also means that I have duties towards it which are the rights it claims over me.

Co-operation on the basis of solidarity within voluntary communities and associations is the basis *par excellence* for social integration and the production of social bonds. It is by starting from that basis and building upon it that we can regain a society and set limits to the economic sphere.[24] A fundamental precondition for this is a reduction of the time spent in paid work.

Up to this point, I have treated work-for-oneself as if it were performed by the whole community. I have therefore left out of account here the division of tasks and the relations of domination which may exist among the various members within the domestic community. In this, I have followed the *modern* conception of the family, according to which a man and a woman (or women, or men) who choose to live together are to be regarded in law as one person. Their union is assumed to be a *voluntary union of equals* and, unless they themselves stipulate otherwise, they are supposed *to share everything* and lead a 'common life'.

This complete sharing (or 'union') implies that *they make no distinction between what each person does for themself and what they do for the other.* Their common life takes place within the common private sphere and that sphere is, in its essence, outside society's gaze and protected from any external interference. What the members of the community do or do not do there and the nature of their relations and their activities is their own private business. Their union, in other words, is assumed to be a union of sovereign persons, who are able to, and have decided to, auto-determine their relations in forms which are their own concern alone. The idea of domination imposed by one member of the community over another (or others) is therefore theoretically excluded from this conception of their union. The well-being and fulfilment of the community is supposed to be the goal of each of its members and the well-being and fulfilment of each of its members the goal of all the others.

Now this conception of the domestic community is a late achievement of modernity and, moreover, one which is still largely incomplete. Women, who in most cases are still expected to shoulder the burden of household chores in fact do more 'work for them' than work for themselves.

When women become aware of this situation and refuse to accept it, the question arises as to whether we are to get beyond this situation by (a) the dissolution of the family as a 'union'; or (b) the completion of its unity?

(a) Since its rebirth during the 1950s, the women's liberation movement has always had a radical wing, which has campaigned for the dissolution of the nuclear family. They argue that women must no longer be expected to do all the 'work of reproduction for free'. They must no longer 'serve' men and the patriarchal family and, through it, a social system which oppresses and exploits them. Their 'housework', which makes work in the economic sense and the physical reproduction of society possible, has to be recognized for its economic utility and accorded social dignity. This recognition must take the form of a 'decent remuneration of *all* the work of *all* women.' By virtue of this remuneration, women would be freed of their economic dependence on men. They would no longer be condemned to remain with men in spite of themselves in the interests of their children. They would not have to share 'everything' with them, including their lives. They would be paid for doing their domestic work just as man is paid for his work. 'Housewife' or 'mother' would be a socially recognized occupation. Thus husband and wife would each work in their own spheres and these respective spheres would interpenetrate only very partially. Their respective tasks and obligations would be clearly defined. The domestic sphere would be the exclusive preserve of women and they would be its sovereign, undisputed rulers. There could be no question of men taking on part of the work there. Wages for housework would, moveover, have the effect and the secondary function of dissuading them from doing so.

This conception deliberately breaks with the ideal of the total emancipation of women to meet up again with the pre-capitalist form of the family. Ivan Illich – who defends this conception, supporting it with anthropological arguments, alongside a relatively influential tendency within the women's movement, particularly in the German Federal Republic – argues that the desire to put women on the same footing as men, considering them as part of the labourforce', has the effect of rendering them inferior.[25] Wherever they are in competition with men, their work is always less valued and less well paid. Now, this economic inferiority has not always existed: it appeared with the invention, by capitalism, of *work* (in the modern economic sense) as a quantifiable performance, that can be regarded in isolation from the person who supplies it. Before the invention of work, which, says Illich, is *unisex* by definition, man and woman developed in quite distinct spheres of activity where they each exercised undisputed power. Their occupations

were gendered, incommensurable and complementary. What each of them did was neither shared nor appropriated by the other. The family as indivisible unit was only invented in Europe, quite late in the day, at the beginning of the modern era to provide a legal basis for the rural, and later for the urban, family enterprise.

Now the recognition of the family as a unit has the effect, argues Illich, of making the unisex conception of work penetrate into the domestic sphere where 'under the guise of shouldering some of the housework, they [men] open a new field for competition and resentment between the sexes.' As jobs become more scarce and men tend to invade what was the women's sphere of power, competing with them on their own terrain, 'discrimination against women, in their own homes, will become more pronounced.'[26]

The idea, then, in this conception, is to restore women's power over the domestic sphere by excluding male 'work' from that sphere. This is the (generally hidden) meaning of the demand for wages for housework. This would, it is argued, guarantee women independence in the home while at the same time bringing social recognition for the usefulness of their domestic labour.

The other side of the coin, obviously, is that women will tend to be confined to the private sphere: society will pay them to stay at home. This is where, in the context of fewer and fewer jobs, she will be considered most useful socially and politically. This social utility will, however, be purely *functional*. Women will *serve* the established order by remaining outside the economic activity which has given them access to the public sphere and citizenship. They therefore run the risk of once again being excluded from that sphere. They will only escape that risk on a permanent basis if women form themselves into an autonomous political force with a permanent organization, capable of engaging in continuous political activity.

We arrive then at a segmentation of society that is more complex and radical than the forms of 'dualization' mentioned in Chapter 6. It is true that this division of society into 'gendered' spheres, which are themselves further subdivided, is the goal pursued by this current within feminism.

(b) Against the position advocated by Illich, I shall now argue for a contrary conception, by suggesting a different interpretation of the materials used in *gender*. My thesis will be as follows: it is not the conjugal union, appearing at the beginnings of the modern era, but the incomplete nature of that union which explains women's exploitation within the family. And the remedy for this situation cannot be the separation of the respective spheres of women and men, but the emancipation of women extending right into relations within the domestic sphere.

If the conjugal union was a late invention of modernity, this is not because it was an anthropological nonsense[27] ('unnatural' as they might have said in days gone by); it is because the family can only establish itself as an autonomous indivisible unit if husband and wife belong mutually to one another and, in their private sphere, have duties only towards each other in perfect reciprocity. So long as husband and wife belonged principally to the feudal lord or to the clan or the village community, their extra-conjugal obligations, which were specific to the respective genders, were an insurmountable obstacle which *power* raised against their mutual belonging one to another. What they had to do in the interests of the collectivity or the lord took precedence by a long way over what they could do in their common interest. Customary or legal rules defining their respective tasks made themselves felt in the home itself and *socially* determined their obligations to one another. The idea that they could throw themselves into a common enterprise was inconceivable. They were not free sovereignly to define their activities and relations as their personal desires and circumstances allowed.[28] Their domestic sphere was not, properly speaking, a private sphere.

It was, therefore, only with their emancipation from feudal domination (and from the traditions which perpetuated it) that a man and a woman could form a union and engage in activities for their own common good within a sphere of shared sovereignty, the private sphere. This was not an invention of capitalism. It emerged through the struggles of the peasantry and laid the ground for the autonomy of the family and the family enterprise: the fruits of labour must belong to those who produce them; the members of a domestic community owe each other loyalty, care and assistance and, within the private sphere, only have to answer for their actions to each other; their relations are private, not legal relations; the domestic sphere lies outside social control and the scope of political power; once one has crossed the threshold of the home, relations between persons are based on understanding, mutual consent and voluntary co-operation, not on obligations formalized in law.

This is the *essence* of the family community. It only conforms to that essence if everything its members do is considered *by each of them* as done by and for the whole community. But this obviously supposes that all the members consider the interest of the community to be their own interest, and vice versa. This can only be the case if the conjugal union of man and wife is a voluntary one and the co-operation between the partners is a *voluntary co-operation between equals*, freely choosing common goals for themselves and freely agreeing about how tasks are to be divided.

Family unity does not therefore exist when one of the partners is required by law to submit themselves to the will of the other. It actually ceases to exist when one of the partners calls on the legal system to regulate their relations with the other: their union is then dissolved *de facto* even before it is dissolved *de jure* through lack of mutual consent and voluntary co-operation. *So long as the woman owes obedience and faithfulness to the man or can be constrained by him, she is the servant of a community of which he is the head and the conjugal union between the two is a legal fiction.*

The family as a sphere of private sovereignty in which a woman and a man voluntarily share everything is therefore not a hangover from the pre-modern era but an *incomplete achievement of modernity.* It will only be completely accomplished when the emancipation of women has been finally achieved, which, in practical terms, means when man and woman voluntarily share the tasks of the private sphere as well as those in the public sphere and belong *equally* to one another. It is only at that moment that the conjugal union will achieve conformity with its essence. It is only at that moment that women, finding themselves in a relation of co-operation between equals with men, will be able to experience the activities in which they engage for the good of the family community as activities of which they are the artisans as well as the beneficiaries, as work-for-oneself.

It is remarkable that this *idea* of a union between equals also corresponds to men's and women's spontaneous aspirations. When they are asked to define the life pattern they would wish to be able to create, most of them choose, as their ideal, the model in which 'the man and the woman both work part time and have a second activity, which they engage in *together* in their free time.'[29] In this model, 'wages for housework' clearly become redundant, since the gradual, programmed reduction in working hours does not entail a loss of revenue. By contrast, the payment of 'wages for housework' tends to exclude women from work in the economic sphere and *perpetuates the obligation for men to work full time.* A fundamental choice about the kind of society we want to live in is involved here.

2. *Autonomous Activities*

In Greek philosophy, freedom and necessity were opposites. The individual became free when he was relieved of the burden of daily necessities. In so far as the extent of these necessities grew as his needs grew, self-limitation and frugality were indispensable virtues for a free man. These virtues were not, however, enough. To free the individual

from the grip of necessities, these had also to be assumed for free men by a group of people who, by definition, were not free: slaves and women. There was therefore, on the one hand, a sphere of liberty and, on the other, a sphere of necessity. People operated in one or the other. They belonged either to the one or the other. It was not usual for them to divide their time between the two.

In the celebrated passage in *Capital* in which Marx reintroduces the theory of the 'two realms', the Aristotelian conception becomes more flexible, but is not transcended; there is still a sphere of necessity and a sphere of freedom. This latter 'begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases.' Just like Aristotle, Marx therefore regards 'necessity', 'need' and 'external purposes' (*äußere Zweckmäßigkeit*) as being of the same order: they are determinations which the subject does not sovereignly derive from his own being and therefore negations of his sovereignty. The realm of freedom only begins 'beyond the realm of necessity' and merges with 'that development of human energy which is an end in itself' (*'der Kraftentfaltung die sich als Selbstzweck gilt'*): with the pursuit of the Good, the Beautiful and the True. The only important difference from Aristotle is that the unfolding of freedom in Marx – or, in other words, in communist society, where the forces of production are fully developed – no longer presupposes that the burden of necessity should be shouldered by unfree social strata. The machine has taken the place of the slaves and the 'associated producers' organize themselves so as to reduce the necessary labour time 'to a minimum', so that everyone can work, though only a little, and that everyone, *alongside* their work, can engage in activities which are themselves their own end. Everyone can divide their time between the two spheres.

I refer to those activities which are themselves their own end as autonomous activities. They are valued for and in themselves not because they have no other objective than the satisfaction and pleasure they procure, but because *the action which achieves the goal is as much a source of satisfaction as the achievement of the goal itself*: the end is reflected in the means and vice versa; I may will the end by virtue of the intrinsic value of the activity which achieves it and the activity by virtue of the value of the end it is pursuing.

If, in Marx's day, the chief opposite of freedom was necessity, this was because work for economic ends and work-for-oneself in the domestic sphere both served essentially to produce what was necessary and allowed practically no time for anything else. Because of the lack of time, work-for-oneself was to be rationalized: time would have to be counted and saved even in the private sphere. This was, so to speak, sucked into and colonized by the economic sphere and tasks there

became, as Illich has shown, 'shadow work' predetermined by the manufacturers of household appliances.[30]

Now, the sphere of necessity today is neither so extensive as it was in Marx's day, nor does it have the same characteristics. Almost all of the production and jobs necessary for life are industrialized; the principal part of our needs is supplied by heteronomous work, that is, by work that is subject to a social division of labour, specialized and professionalized and performed with a view to commodity exchange. Neither the exchange value of such work, nor its length, nature, goal or meaning can be determined by us as sovereign individuals. Morever, this heteronomous work,[31] through the sale of which we procure almost all we need, also serves to produce superfluous goods or to incorporate in necessary goods useless elements whose real or supposed symbolic value merely serves, in modifying the image of the product, to increase its exchange value (its price). We are therefore less in thrall to the 'necessities' of existence than to the external determination of our lives and our activity by the imperatives of a social apparatus of production and organization which provides willy-nilly both the essential and the superfluous, the economic and the anti-economic, the productive and the destructive.

This is why, in our daily experience, it is no longer so much the freedom/necessity distinction which is decisive, but the autonomy/heteronomy opposition. Freedom consists less (or rather consists less and less) in freeing ourselves from the work we need to do to live and more in freeing ourselves from heteronomy, that is, in reconquering spaces of autonomy in which we can *will what we are doing and take responsibility for it.*

Things have even reached the point where those aspiring to autonomy feel they can achieve this through the return to preindustrial modes of production of necessities and where, depending on which author one is reading, the adjective 'autonomous' applies either to craft production for one's own needs or to some form of self-managed or self-determined 'alternative' market activity. There is thus complete confusion. The examples which follow attempt to dissipate this confusion. We must not, in arguing that autonomy is defined principally by its opposition to heteronomy, forget the other dimension of the problem: autonomy also stands opposed to necessity, not because all necessary activity is inevitably heteronomous (*this is not the case at all*), but because the autonomy of an activity dictated by necessity is condemned to remain purely formal.

I will first of all recall therefore the definition common to both Marx and Aristotle: those activities are autonomous which are themselves their own end. In those activities, subjects experience their own sovereignty

and fulfil themselves as persons. Commodity activities are therefore excluded by their very essence from this category. Their goal is commodity exchange which, as we have seen in respect of activities of assistance and caring, and also of prostitution, relativizes and contaminates the intrinsic, incommensurable value of the action and work performed. Thus painters do not paint pictures in order to sell them; they put them on sale to show them and to be able to continue to paint. If they paint to sell, they must paint to please and their quest will no longer be directed by an immanent necessity but by changes in fashion, taste and advertising style.

The same is true of craft production, which is wrongly equated with autonomous production. The craftworker or fashion designer who invents or produces pullovers for sale on the market has a large degree of technical autonomy. However, their activity remains broadly heteronomous: they must determine their style and their patterns not as a function of their own ideas and tastes like works of art, but with regard to the place (the 'gap') in the market that they hope to occupy and the most profitable price-to-cost relation. Their activity will thus largely be dominated by the kind of constraints that show up in economic and technical calculations. The situation will be quite different in the case of the neighbourhood association whose members create a knitwear workshop with semi-professional equipment, with the aim of making pullovers for their own use, their own pleasure and even perhaps for an exhibition or a non-commercial competition. These products which are made in their free time have no price. The time needed to produce them is not counted; a large part of it will, in any case, have been spent in discussion. Each product is a 'work of art' which people have taken pleasure in making and which they will take pleasure in wearing or giving.

This does not mean, of course, that these things will not be exchanged. But it rules out the possibility of that exchange taking a commodity form. The only form such exchange can take on within the sphere of autonomous activities is the form of the reciprocal gift. I give this to you without asking for anything in return; you accept this gift gladly and seek to give me something in your turn. It is not a question of giving me the equivalent of what you have received. This would be insulting and you know it. It is a matter of setting up a relationship of generosity in which each person regards the other *unconditionally* as an absolute end. We have encountered this type of relationship in respect of teaching or therapeutic activities, assistance or care. Artistic activities (whether they involve performance or creation), political campaigning, charitable work, worship, scientific or philosophical research are all by their essence of this same order. They are not ways of earning a living;

they involve an unconditional giving of oneself and this gift is recognized precisely in its *incommensurable* value when the public 'honours' it by a payment which never has the sense of a purchase, that is, as giving an equivalent amount in exchange: an audience shows its appreciation of an artist by standing ovations even when it has paid dearly for the opportunity to hear her or him.

To say that autonomous activities cannot have exchange as their goal is not a sufficient characterization. They also have to be free of necessity: they have to be motivated by nothing but the desire to bring the Good, the True and the Beautiful into the world. In other words, they have to stem from a conscious choice which nothing forces me to make. Thus auto-production of a part of life's necessities can only be an autonomous activity if it is not itself subject to necessity. Thus the community which, living under conditions of almost total autarky, has to produce all the bread it needs for its subsistence, is engaged in an activity which can only have at best a formal autonomy. By sculpting the tools employed, by carving ornate patterns on the loaves, by surrounding the removal of the bread from the oven with prayers and celebrations and so on, it is overdetermining work which simply has to be done by these optional activities, which serve no utilitarian goal. The dimension of autonomy here remains a subordinate one. The goal of the activity is to make bread. That process may provide an opportunity for rejoicing and artistic activity, but *the opposite is not true*: these rejoicings cannot emancipate themselves completely from the work that is necessary, nor transfigure this to the point where it would appear as an end in itself.

On the other hand, the inhabitants of a block of flats or a neighbourhood who get together to install a wood-fired oven so that, instead of buying their bread cheaply from the local baker, they can join together to produce organic bread in their free time, are engaging (as was the knitwear group mentioned above) in an autonomous activity: this bread is an optional product. They have chosen to produce it simply for the pleasure of making it, eating it, giving it as a present, or, through it, seeking a perfection whose norms they have defined for themselves. Each loaf is a work of art rather than a manufactured product; the pleasure of learning, co-operating and improving one's skills is predominant and the need to feed oneself merely a subordinate consideration. The time devoted to making bread is – like the time spent playing an instrument, gardening, campaigning, exchanging knowledge and so on – one's own living time. The activity is self-rewarding, both by its results and the capabilities which its accomplishment allows me to acquire.

We can see the political significance of these distinctions: auto-production and co-operative activities can only be autonomous

activities if each person's necessities are secured for them elsewhere. The development of a sphere of autonomous activities can have no economic relevance. The idea of a 'dual economy' comprising a commodity or heteronomous sector and a convivial sector of autonomous activities is a nonsense. Economic activity in the modern sense defined above[32] cannot by its essence be its own end, even though it may contain – where it is co-operative, self-organized and self-managed – dimensions of autonomy which make it more fulfilling and pleasing.

But the development of a public space of autonomous activities may *give rise to* a limited reduction in the service and provision requirements of the welfare state. In other words, when free time ceases to be scarce, certain educative, caring and assistance activities and the like may be partially repatriated into the sphere of autonomous activities and reduce the demand for these things to be provided by external services, whether public or commercial. The opposite development is, on the other hand, out of the question. An expansion in the sphere of autonomous activities cannot, by definition, *come about as a result of* a policy which reduces state provision and state services, thus leaving those social strata least able to do so to fend for themselves. The expansion of a sphere of autonomy always presupposes that, time no longer being counted, individuals have chosen to repatriate into the domestic or microsocial sphere of voluntary co-operation activities which, for want of time, they had abandoned to external services.

Notes

1. Hilkka Pietilä, 'Tomorrow Begins Today. Elements for a Feminine Alternative in the North', *IFDA Dossier 57/58*, Nyon (Switzerland), pp. 37–54. The author goes on to call for the so-called primary economy to be made to serve the invisible economy, thus increasing the confusion: to the notion that all activity is 'work' is added the notion that all activity is economic. What she is really calling for is an economic system in the service of the private, family sphere, which 'also produces things (sic) that cannot be bought on the market, such as intimacy, encouragement, the sense of being somebody, recognition and the meaning of life.'
2. See above, p. 109–12.
3. Cf. Part I, Chapter 1.
4. These letters refer to parameters defined on pp. 138–9.
5. These letters refer to the parameters defined on pp. 138–9.
6. [Trans.] The French system operates along the following lines: all forms of medical treatment are codified by the social security department, which reimburses the patient for the treatment she or he has received at a nationally fixed standard rate.
7. The advantage of health-maintenance organizations (HMOs) is that they separate the doctor–patient relationship from the commercial relationship, whilst at the same time avoiding the centralization and anonymity of state health services. Doctors and ordinary citizens both have an equal interest in the self-limitation of the use and provision of treatment. Preventative health care is thus accorded importance and may take a number of different forms: eliminating health-endangering practices, public debates on hygiene,

nutrition, personal responsibility for one's own health, environmental awareness, and so on.

8. Among the pioneers of proposals of this type, we should mention Werner Geissberger, a deputy in the regional parliament of Aargau, who, in the early 1970s, promoted the idea of 'small networks' (*kleine Netze*) – types of co-operatives providing neighbourhood services for groups of about fifteen households; and Ego Matzner, an Austrian socialist, whose idea of 'self-organization of public services' was applied in various parts of Vienna. For more details, see his extremely interesting, *Wohlfahrtsstaat und Wirtschaftskrise*, Reinbek 1978, particularly chs 5, 6 and 10.

More recently, Ulf Fink, the Berlin senator in charge of social affairs, produced a series of original proposals for the mutualization of voluntary activities for the care of the disabled elderly. He envisages, in particular, a system whereby the volunteers providing these services will be entitled to these services themselves when they need them in the future. The supply and demand of these voluntary services would be co-ordinated by agencies on the lines of the British 'houses of volunteers'* and the voluntary services performed would be registered by the public social services so that if the volunteers move to a different area, they will still be eligible for the services provided in their new area. See Ulf Fink, 'Der neue Generationenvertrag', *Die Zeit* (Hamburg) 15, 3 April 1987, p. 24. See below p. 159 for the example of apartment block co-operatives in Scandinavia.

9. These letters refer to the parameters defined on pp. 138–9.

10. This is exactly what Sartre refers to as 'bad faith' in *Being and Nothingness*.

11. A copulating machine was developed in West Germany by Beate Uhse, whose company runs a network of sex shops, Eros Centers, pornographic cinemas and magazines. The demand for permission to market this 'love machine' was sent to the federal hygiene services in 1985. The latter have yet to make known their decision.

12. Two people who belong to each other are always a danger to the social order: its rules cease to be valid in the context of their relationship. Orwell gave a perfect demonstration of this, from the point of view of the state, in *1984* as did Baxter and Sade before him. In their commentary on Sade, Horkheimer and Adorno write:

> Science and industry denounced as metaphysics not merely romantic sexual love, but every kind of universal love, for reason displaces all love: that of woman for man as much as that of the lover for his sweetheart, parental affection as much as that of children for their parents . . . The family, held together not by romantic sexual love, but by mother love, which constitutes the ground of all tenderness and social emotions, conflicts with society itself.

And they quote Sade:

> Do not think you can make good republicans so long as you isolate in your family the children who should belong to the community alone . . . If it is wholly disadvantageous to allow children to imbibe interests from their family circle which are often quite different from those of their country, it is wholly advantageous to separate them from their family.

> Conjugal ties [Horkheimer and Adorno continue] are to be destroyed on social grounds; acquaintance with their fathers is to be '*absolument interdite*' to children. Sade conceived the full course of the state socialism with whose first steps St. Just and Robespierre tumbled.

Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming, New York 1972. Second British publication, London 1979, pp. 116–17.

13. This is what this text which comes from dogmatic Marxist-feminist literature suggests: 'A woman's body and her labour power have always been used *free of charge* for alien needs. It is therefore crucial that she retake possession of them and be paid for their use.'

14. G. Gilder, a neo-Liberal ideologue and author of *Wealth and Poverty* among other works, maintains that an economic recovery could be established on shoeshining and selling flowers on street corners.

15. In *Revue française d'économie*, 3, summer 1987.

16. Cf., for example, Michel Drancourt and Albert Merlin, *Demain la croissance*, Paris 1986; and Octave Gelinier, *Le chômage guéri . . . si nous le voulons*, Paris 1986.

17. Philippe Seguin, article quoted.

18. CFDT, *Activités en friche . . . gisements d'emploi*, March 1987, p. 9.

19. '*Hausfrauisierung*', a term coined by Claudia von Werlhof.

20. The great majority of jobs created in the last twelve or so years in the United States are irregular, under-paid servants' jobs.

21. I will examine this in greater detail in Part III.

22. For further details, see *Scandinavian Housing and Planning Research*, 2, 1985, and 2 and 3, 1986; and Cornelia Cremer, Hans-Joachim Kujath, 'Wohnreform als Reform des Alltagslebens', *Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, 2, 1988.

23. Hence the extraordinary success, in Denmark and Norway, of a movement called 'The future in our hands', whose aim is the self-limitation of consumption, with the sums of money saved being used to aid the Third World.

24. It should be remembered here that the labour movement itself was originally a mutualist, co-operative (in England) and cultural movement, centred on working-class housing areas. On the potentialities of the new co-operativism in the United States, see Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution, Understanding the New Citizen Movement*, Philadelphia 1980.

25. See Ivan Illich, *Gender*, London 1983.

26. Illich, *Gender*, p. 59. The same theory is maintained in West Germany by Claudia von Werlhof.

27. Illich, *Gender*, p. 105.

28. In *Love and Power in the Peasant Family: rural France in the nineteenth century*, Oxford 1983, Martine Segalen (quoted by Illich, *Gender*, p. 109) notes that, in the French countryside, even in the nineteenth century, men and women performed their daily tasks more as members of their respective gender than as partners united in marriage. 'The coupled pair carried little weight in the nineteenth-century French peasant household . . .' If they 'do not act in accordance with the demand of their respective genders, then the community will discipline the offending individual directly.'

29. See, on this subject, Guy Aznar, *Tous à mi-temps!*, Paris 1981.

30. See Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work*, London 1981.

31. To recap, the heteronomy of a job *does not lie* merely in the fact that I must submit to the orders of a superior in the hierarchy, or, which amounts to the same thing, to the rhythm of a preprogrammed machine. Even if I control my own time schedule, rhythm of work and the way in which I complete a highly skilled, complex task, my work is still heteronomous when the objective or final product to which it contributes is outside my control. Heteronomous work is not necessarily completely devoid of autonomy: it may be heteronomous because the specialized, even complex activities involved, which require a considerable degree of technical autonomy of the workers, are pre-determined by a system (organization) to whose functioning they contribute as if they were the cogs in a machine. Cf. above, Chapter 3, p. 32 and Chapter 7, pp. 78–9 ff.

32. Cf. pp. 109–12, 137–9.

*Local centres for the free exchange of services. The idea originated in Quebec. [Trans.]