

# A/Traverso Notebook #1

October, 1975

- a few theses
- intellectual labour and negation
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Paths of recomposition

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back:

A/Traverso recognizes and situates itself within the camp of autonomy [*area di autonomia*]\*.

Such a camp is not to be identified within its organized frame [quadro organizzato], since it represents nothing other than the tip of an iceberg extending through the social behaviors of insubordinate social strata, which, underneath the official scene of politics, produces new possibilities for the movement.

Today's organizing task within the frame of autonomy is not centralization, but rather, transversal re-composition. Today, the revolutionary subject reconstructs itself in the midst of a long phase of capitalistic reconstruction and modification of the idea of class, as well as the redefinition of the movement around *autonomia operaia*\*.

Autonomy should be thought and acted upon as a need for separ/A(C)TION for, and by, different social strata with their respective specificities (women, youth, homosexuals, absenteeists, illegals) in opposition to a whole, unified class without distinction. Single instances of Separ/A(C)TION transform existence by multiplying small groups.

To transversally recompose (worker(ist) direction) is to translate and turn disparate separatist movements into a movement of separACTION.

A separation of workers' needs from capitalistic social reorganization.

It is necessary to start to think communism, no longer in an eschatological way—as a thing of the future—but rather as a contemporary, separate, reality (hostile and alien to capitalistic society, to its functioning) capable of pushing the latter forward and transforming it, as an engine of development, as workers' power [*potere operaio*] actualizing the form of moving existence.

To think of communism as a form of transformation, of desire in liberation. As the real movement concretely abolishing, (in the present) the present state of affairs.

Great disorder under the sky: an excellent situation

1 In the current self-determining phase – within the crisis, the restructuring, and beyond recession – communism no longer takes the form of a need asking for a fulfilling answer; rather, it takes the form of a liberation of possibilities contained within, although compressed by, the capitalistic system: The reduction of necessary labor time; the minoritarization of the social strata bound to productive labor; the enormous deployment of scientific intelligence applied to technology. This twofold process makes possible, and at the same time urgent for the urban class strata, the liberation of life from waged labor.

“It is so obviously clear that Tayloristic organization must be dismantled; and that this should happen in the interest of, and by, the very same class, so that the

following principle be put into action: not an impossible use by workers (socialist use) of the machinery... but, rather, a choice in and a conquering of creativity, of the conception and the process of technical innovation on the workers' part; not aiming at increasing productivity, nor striving for self-expulsion from the production process, but rather, within the logic of a forward-moving reduction to null of alienated labor." (A. Casiccia: *Ideology of the limits of development and restructuring*, in *Aut aut*, 147 – my transl.) More and more, the capitalistic system shows itself as sheer domination over labor, as violent containment of autonomy; what is opposed to the system of valorization is no longer need (need passes as mediation for job performance [*prestazione*]<sup>i</sup>, the exchange of labor in order to obtain a salary), but desire for appropriation of one's own time and body – a trend that has been made possible by [capitalistic] development. And the enduring existence of backwards niches does not invalidate the premises of our argument. The extremism of self-liberating desire functions as an accelerating element for capitalistic development and for the material homogenization of the class towards upper [social] strata.

2) During the crisis, the capitalistic need for pushing back wages and containing proletarian consumption determines, from the part of the *bourgeoise* ideology, the appropriation of anti-consumeristic themes and arguments, generally collected under the "quality of life" category. Although this ideological argument – which puts together under-developmental and anti-consumeristic themes – had plenty of followers within the movement, especially within the student strata, its reprisal by capital melts different hypotheses in one caldron, such as a new mode of production or zero growth rate, a new scale for social, and non-private, consumption, or ecology. This reprisal has given strength to different forces such as the New Left or Reformism, Neo-Mysticism and reactionary humanist positions.

In this situation, nonetheless, a proletarian answer emerges as a challenge, putting the form of existence into question. Such an answer constitutes itself by refusing a reduction in consumption, and by acknowledging at the same time that the atomistic, isolated, privatized form of existence be one of the majorly weak spots of the proletariat; by acknowledging also that family and the private household, as *bourgeoise* dictatorship over daily (life) [*il quotidiano*], are the main instruments for the coercion to work; by transforming the interpersonal relationships and living spaces in order to render existence as independent as possible from the constant blackmailing of the wage-system, by achieving autonomy from the factory, with the collectivization of available and disposable wealth, by practicing, outside of any contractual logic, appropriation and auto-reduction.

The subject of such an answer is a social stratum that has made the heritage of anti-productivism and collectivism, inherited from the struggles of the 60s, their own; this stratum is the young proletariat, the mass characteristic of which is the precariousness and informality of the labor relationship: this informality is a consequence of both fear by the owners-employers [*padroni*]<sup>ii</sup> of hiring, as factory workers, the youngsters educated and trained after 1969, and of the will by the youngsters and workers not to bind their life to a wage. This stratum is the bearer of the maturity of communism: the refusal of labor, the transformation of life-time liberated from labor, the possibility for reproducing the world of existing goods without binding the whole of life to labor.

The young proletariat is thus the holder of techno-scientific intelligence accumulated during the struggle between workers and capital, a techno-scientific intelligence that capital wills to reduce to its own goal of exercising domination over the work-life of others; whereas the young working class can, instead, liberate the accumulated social

intelligence, in order to make of it an instrument for liberation from labor. Furthermore, this stratum is the subject that, in the present condition of crisis and expulsion from factories of large strata within the workforce, is pushing a process of transformation of liberated life-time forward, individuating and acknowledging in the misery of daily (life)\* the form of *bourgeoise* dictatorship, and is thus posing the question of happiness and the destruction of the existing form of interpersonal relationships, for, and toward, the autonomy of proletarian existence.

3) The capitalistic social organization is no longer able to contain the subjective forces that have been produced during the course of its own development. Although the capacities of an overall control of institutions are now being reduced, liberating and liberated social forces install themselves on a space that is an 'other' from the space of labor and institution, a space that is of autonomy and auto-transformation. In this process, the problem facing the liberated forces is not to counter-oppose a new whole order, i.e. to aim at governing all social relations, while arresting the unstoppable entropy engendered within the conflict between life-time and work-time. These forces, instead, are facing the problem of their own self-determination as a part, and, at the same time, of the subtraction and withdrawal of new forces from capitalistic domination, by transforming the productive structure into a dialectical process of struggle and alienness which, although it guarantees the working class the power of, and over, its own movements, leaves the forces of capital with the overall government, with the necessity of reorganizing henceforth its own productive and social machine, with the attempt to stem the dissolution of its own dominion, leading to the result of accelerating the liberation of new forces from the dominion of labor. This process is not, however, taking place in a peaceful manner, as the liberated forces are not entrenching themselves in the ghetto of misery and self-management [*auto-gestione*], but they are rather fighting the attempt at disaggregating organized autonomy, continuously pushing ahead in the struggle against the organization of labor, and fighting for the transformation of the productive machine, as an instrument of control and domination, into an instrument for replacing living labor. Therefore, the problem of violence has to be redefined within this frame, pushing it outside a Third-Internationalist conception: it is not a matter of producing an armed organization capable of operating in a specular way against the State, by taking the latter's movements as a model, and by covering its overall extension; it is rather a matter of providing the liberated forces with the armed instruments to defend and extend the conquered spaces; however, the weaponry and tactics must not be modeled on the State's mode of operation, in order to control the universe of social relations, but rather on the needs of the proletarian strata in movement. The structure to be built is not a regular army thrusting against the core of the State; let the small groups in transformation be the ones to inscribe in their posture the destruction of the State's repressive articulations, in order to allow the proletariat, in the process of liberation, the autonomy of its movements.

4)

We shall be aware of the fact that capitalism as a system of domination over work aiming at valorization and accumulation, is still destined to live for a very long historic period. This is not to say that communism dislocates itself in time: communism lives contemporaneously, inside and against, as the organization of social forces embroiled in the process of liberation—as the form of their liberation. However, communism solves no problems: it urgently, violently and despotically poses questions, which the system is forced to answer in order to survive.

This process is what interests us. This power as despotism of, and by, a part – and not as government over the whole society – is the power that must be exercised. This long time coexistence, however, is not, and will never, be peaceful. Capitalism uses terror against the movement in its desperate attempt to reduce the accelerating entropy within its system. The workers' autonomy [*autonomia operaia*]\* and the liberation movement must reply to terror with all their available weapons, in order to defend their own right to self-determination. They must do so not to counter-oppose a new order to this disintegrating order; but rather to organize the process of liberation of those forces that the system can no longer contain, but to which development continues to offer new material possibilities.

5)

The capitalistic attack against the current class composition is determined by the massification of techno-scientific intellectual workforce. The techno-scientific intelligence is produced within the conflict between workers and capital; such intelligence reduces the necessary labor, allowing the possible substitution of living labor with machines, and ensuring the latter's productive functioning.

In the moment in which, however, the information-technologization of the work process massifies and proletarianizes a social stratum of intellectual workers, and the latter encounter the educated and politicized workforce formed during the 60/70s, a new, decisive contradiction opens up. The machinery is rendered by capitalistic use as a structure of control and domination over and of workers' movements; the aim of the formal suppression of work is to eliminate autonomy and decompose the class body. However, in the moment in which intellectual labor is proletarianized, this stratum becomes the bearer of the most advanced class needs, but also – as the holder of accumulated social knowledge [*sapere*]<sup>iii</sup> also becomes the bearer of material possibilities for the worker-led transformation of the production mechanism, from instrument of control and intensification of exploitation into an instrument of liberation from labor.

*“In machinery, knowledge appears as alien, external to him [to the worker]; [...] However, while capital gives itself its adequate form as use value within the production process only in the form of machinery [...] this in no way means that this use value -- machinery as such -- is capital, or that its existence as machinery is identical with its existence as capital”* Marx, *Grundrisse*, transl. M. Nicolaus, Penguin, 1973 - NOTEBOOK VII End of February, March. End of May -- Beginning of June 1858, pp. 623/631)<sup>iv</sup>

The domination of valorization, the contradiction between use value and exchange value, prevents the application of a quantity of possibilities contained in science to technology; the proletarianization of intellectual labor, however, opens up the possibility for the workers of a use of science that is theirs [*uso operaio*]; such a use consists not of the workers' direct management (mediated by intellectual labor) on the production process and the organization of labor, but of the dissociation between development and power. The subsumption of intellectual labor under the production process, as it were, is accompanied by its readiness to struggle against the organization of labor, as well as against the use and structure of the machinery.

This conflictual feature of intellectual labor in the production process, opposed to the use of the former by capital, is the ground for a reversal of the very same function of science and machinery. This moment when the capitalistic development reaches its limit, and the contradiction between the production of use value and valorization

perfectly reveals itself and hints to its own reversal shall be analyzed with *Grundrisse*, Vol. II at hand. It is in this direction that the problem of subjective proletarianization of techno-scientific labor reveals itself as central. Hence, capital is faced with the urgent problem of control on this social stratum, on this essential function that is labor abolishing labor [*lavoro che abolisce lavoro*] (i.e. techno-scientific labor). Culture must function as mediation between the interests of capitalistic society and those of the intellectual stratum; but it also must try to actualize this function in a brand new way. Now, in fact, the mystification of culture as independent from the production process (dominated, until yesterday, by the control on intellectual labor) is pushed into a crisis by the same massification of this social figure. The political hypotheses that – from the workers' part – aimed at the aggregation of the intellectuals as an autonomous social stratum on the basis whether of a cultural mediation (Gramscism) or of a voluntary adhesion to the party (Lenin's “what is to be done”), are thus surpassed.

At this point, therefore, whereas the function of techno-scientific labor is shown to be central in the production process – but also decisive for the workers' subversion of the system of exploitation – the capitalistic control tends to actualize itself in the attempt to both reduce the function of intellectual labor to just its positive figure, as productive labor, and negate its subversive figure, as refusal of waged labor.

“To contain knowledge [*sapere*] within labor, and link it all and only to productivity ... the choice of the historical compromise [*compromesso storico*]<sup>v</sup> is such as exactly as to nail intelligence to productivity ... containment of knowledge [*sapere*] within the limit of labor, determinate negation of a specific political use value of knowledge, of a direct relation between political needs and critical forms of knowledge” Pier Aldo Rovatti: *Intellettuali e compromesso storico*, Aut aut, 147; my transl.)

Techno-scientific labor is, on the contrary, the bearer of communism's material possibility, just as the young proletariat, to which intellectuals are socially linked, is the historical bearer of communism's urgency.

6)

What is the role of politics, of militancy, in this process? What does “politics” mean from Marx on[?] It is the comprehension of the trend, the individuation of latency, of possibilities, the militant exercise of all the instruments that may allow for the transformation of the real, in terms of inscribing the subject in the process, and enabling the emergence of the latent, as well as the realization and actualization of possibility. Politics is the insertion of the subject in the process.

For Hegel, “*everything depends on grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as Substance but as Subject as well [...] The living substance, further, is that being which is truly subject, or, what is the same thing, is truly realised and actual (wirklich) solely in the process of positing itself, or in mediating with its own self its transitions from one state or position to the opposite [...] The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development.*”-Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Mind*, Preface, pp. 15-17 (Transl. Intro. & Notes by J. B. Baillie, London/New York, Swan Sonnenschein & Co./The MacMillan Co., 1910)<sup>vi</sup>

In Hegel, every possibility of distinguishing between the process and the subject is taken away and sublated, as the latter is entirely exhausted in the unfolding

of the real, in the self-realizing and self-actualizing of truth (in the necessity of the trend). The subject, as rupture, is not given: it is only realization, the becoming-truth of truth [*inveramento*]<sup>vii</sup>.

But if Hegelian Idealism suppresses the autonomy of mediation and ignores the specificity of the subject, the Post-Engelsian Idealism rigorously splits process from subject, and conceives them as indeterminate abstractions. In Post-Engelsian Idealism, constituting the methodological fabric upon which the theory of official Marxism is founded, the process is reduced to sheer raw materiality (Economicism), while the subject is will and consciousness, with no material thicknesses. Socialism and Leninism presuppose this mechanical separation between subject and process, while the party is understood as terroristic unification, as reduction of the process to the will of the subject.

Marx speaks of double positing. “*This double positing, this relating to self as to an alien, becomes damn real in this case.*” *Grundrisse*, ivi, p. 381.<sup>viii</sup>

The subject poses the real outside of itself, as something to be known and transformed. But this posing outside of itself is “damn real”; the real, as a matter of fact, has on his turn posed the subject outside of itself, has counter-opposed it to itself, has forced it to alienness. The subject can pose itself outside, in a condition of alienness (a knowing and practical alienness) only insofar as the subject itself is materially posed-to-being [*posto in essere*] – determined – by the process. The subject is “in” process, and only insofar can it know and transform the real. This distinction between subject and process, though, must be saved, maintained and underscored, since it is only from this same distinction that one comprehends the unity (political, historical) between the two, a unity that is made possible by the transforming knowledge [*conoscenza*] and activity.

This is, essentially, the theme of organization. Two lines are thus present here: one presupposes a kind of mechanistic separation between the actual movement and the political frame, and thinks the organizing process in terms of centralization, of voluntaristic aggregation of, and by, the organizing subject outside of the process. The other line negates the very problem of the political frame (situation), of militancy, of the specific thickness of the subject with respect to the process; the movement would produce self-capable behaviors of designing a curve of transformation in which the subject must immerse and drown itself, negating the rupture of politics.

We think of, instead, the relationship between subject and process in terms of a/traversamento [*breaking-through*], of transversal re-composition of behaviors emerging in the process. This a/traversamento, though, is made possible by the existence of a specific subject, which finds, in the process, the place of its formation, even though it is not reduced to its existence as social frame, but rather knows the process as something alien, critically differentiates itself from the latter and, thus, transforms it. Even when facing the existence of the young proletariat, the difference between social frame and political frame must be reaffirmed, otherwise, one ends up worshipping the existent condition, without grasping its processual contradictoriness.

The nexus between materialism and autonomy must therefore be rendered explicit in its theoretical and political implications. Materialism is the inscription of the subject (the thinking, speaking, transforming subject) in the order of discourse [*ordine del discorso*] (thinking, historical process). Idealism thinks that thinking thinks itself, that the process fulfills itself by posing itself as the subject of itself. Revisionism is founded upon and within this idealistic removal of the subject; politics then becomes an institutional place where no material need is pulsing, where purely institutional figures are acting (and the concept of “autonomy of the political”

does nothing other than sanctify this reduction of politics to an institutional rite from which the needs of the masses are removed). The voluntaristic reversal of this removal reestablishes a figure of the subject that is deprived of historical determinateness. The subject is outside of the process, and so the material needs of the masses are relegated in the background. The subject is not the class, with its needs, its materiality; it is rather its consciential [*coscienziale*], voluntaristic figure (the party ...)

When (with Marx and Freud) material need grounds the subject on the process, there it becomes possible to ground unity on distinction. Sex speaks in language, the refusal of labor acts in history. Class autonomy is the subject's self-posing as determinateness and, at the same time, as alienness; as need and necessity but, at the same time, as possibility and actual liberation [*liberazione in atto*]<sup>ix</sup>.

In the fluidity of the process what must be recognized is this hardness, this point around which tensions concentrate and aggregate themselves, around which the possibilities living in the process unfold, although doing so at the disaggregated state of the symptom. The subject is so hard [*durezza*] that *a/traversa* [*breaks-through*] and recomposes. But let us acknowledge how this hardness is necessary, for liberation.

Transl. by Francesco Guercio  
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i The Italian *prestazione*, translated here as *job performance*, maintains in its very etymology both the sense of *availability* and *readiness* [as deriving from the Latin *prae + stare: standing before* (someone)] as well as the sense of something that is given in order to be given back, and by extension, given in order to receive something else back in a regime of reciprocity (cf. the corresponding verb *prestare*, commonly translated as *to lend*). In the market system, *prestazione* would be intended as worker's activity or, rather worker's life-time, given in exchange for a wage – which is a grounding fictional equivalence for capitalism, made possible by money as general equivalent form. Nonetheless – and this is what interests us here in the difference between *performance* and *prestazione* – the latter term ironically hints at a mystification informing the temporal logic of relations of production, within the waged-labor system, as *prestazioni*, i.e. as activity/life-time that is readily given by the worker only in order to always be – in a future that is posed, though never reached – given back. For an Italian-speaking *operaio*, a worker's *prestazione* is not only alienated and given-away life-time as something always already exceeding any time/money equivalence and, thus, any possible reciprocity (according to the class divide-enforcing narrative that constantly re-affirms the thetic time/money equivalence while, at the same time, negates it according to the following structure: “**A**)You must give your life-time away for a price in order to live your time, although **B**)You cannot buy your life-time back, because **C**) your life-time is priceless!”) but also entails, in the very sense of the term, the ever postponed messianic promise of a *restitutio ad integrum* of alienated life-time by, and for, the worker, i.e. the possibility for a life-time that, although given away, has always been lent [*prestato*] and, therefore, *will be given back*. The capitalistic wage-labor system, in the form of *prestazione* as a temporal logic of asymptotic postponement, blatantly shows its inner structural solidarity with religious economies of gift, debt and restitution, especially Christianity: indeed another example of *Kapitalismus als Religion*, even in the concretions of languages. Needless to say, capitalism in the form of *prestazione*, while setting for the worker the restitution of their life-time in a transcendental future, grounds the conditions for the ever present state of affairs where the class divide runs between those who can afford not to sell or, which is the same, buy their time back – within the time/money equivalence – and those who cannot. (Transl.)

ii The Italian term *padrone*, translated here as *owner/employer*, is etymologically related to the Latin word *pater* (father), and not only is a vessel for both the sense of *the one who possesses and puts to work*, but also the wider sense of *the one who unboundedly disposes of things and beings*. This shows how the power deployed by the *padrone* in the capitalistic system, more than being informed on the structure of power relations arisen within the political public sphere, is instead informed on the master-type, fatherly, authority on subordinates within the economical unity of the οἶκος (*oikos*): the economic power of owners/employers is indeed a despotic, *oikonomical*, power. [Cf. the Latin *dominus* and the Greek δεσπότης (*despotes*)]

iii The difference between *sapere e conoscenza* (analog to the difference maintained in other Roman languages, cf. the French *savoir/connaissance*) is collapsed here in the English word *knowledge*. As a provisional translation, *sapere* would carry the sense vesseled by both the English terms *wisdom* and *know-how*, while *conoscenza* would signify more of a *theoretical knowledge*. I decided here not to enter into subtleties – and translate both terms as *knowledge* –although specifying for the reader, which one is which according to the single cases.

iv K. Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, First German ed. Marx–Engels Institute, Moscow, 1939-41 (Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1974), pp. 586/7. Original German: “*Das Wissen erscheint in der Maschinerie als fremdes außer ihm [dem Arbeiter]; [...] Wenn aber das Kapital in der Maschinerie und andren stofflichen Daseinsformen des capital fixe, wie Eisenbahnen etc. (worauf wir später kommen werden) sich erst seine adäquate Gestalt als Gebrauchswert innerhalb des Produktionsprozesses gibt, so heißt das keineswegs, daß dieser Gebrauchswert —die Maschinerie an sich —Kapital ist, oder daß ihr Bestehn als Maschinerie identisch ist mit ihrem Bestehn als Kapital;*”.

v The “*compromesso storico*”, (historic compromise), was a political agreement, as well as a line of thought of approximation and collaboration, between the two major Italian parties during the 70s:



the leading Democrazia Cristiana (Catholic, center-right wing party) and the Partito Comunista Italiano (Communist Party). The agreement was meant to grant D.C.-lead administrations with the Communist Party's support, as well as allow the latter's bigger involvement in the government of the country, even though it was heavily criticized and boycotted both by the forces on the Left within and outside the P.C.I., as well as by the forces on the Right within and outside the D.C..

vi G.W.F. Hegel: *System der Wissenschaft. Erster Teil, die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Bamberg und Würzburg 1807. Original German: “*alles darauf an, das Wahre nicht als Substanz, sondern ebenso sehr als Subjekt aufzufassen und auszudrücken [...] Die lebendige Substanz ist ferner das Sein, welches in Wahrheit Subjekt, oder, was dasselbe heißt, welches in Wahrheit wirklich ist, nur insofern sie die Bewegung des Sich-selbst-setzens, oder die Vermittlung des Sich-anders-werdens mit sich selbst ist. [...] Das Wahre ist das Ganze. Das Ganze aber ist nur das durch seine Entwicklung sich vollendende Wesen.*” (Italics by Hegel).

vii The Hegelian *Verwirklichung*.

viii K. Marx, *ivi*, p. 353. Original German: “*Das Doppelt-Setzen, sich auf sich selbst als fremdes beziehn, wird in diesem case verdammt real.*”.

ix The Italian *in atto*, genealogically referring back to the Aristotelian ἐνέργεια [*energeia*] and the Latin *actualitas*, is to be understood in its opposition to the (*essere*) *in potenza*, i.e. the *being in potency*, as something the mode of being of which is its possible *not being actual*. Retracing here the genealogy of the Aristotelian fundamental distinction in the realm of being is clearly out of question. Nonetheless, in my opinion, what must be retained here regarding class autonomy is that liberation, far from being the separated result of a process distinct from the subject, is indeed a becoming-revolutionary of the subject to be considered as the hardcore, the cluster of processual aggregations around which tensions and possibility concentrate and concretize. Hence, a liberation that, in its making, is always already *liberazione in atto*.