

General Economy: The Entrance of Multitude into Production

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abstract

The concept general economy is an attempt to rethink economy or to understand economy on the same condition based on which political philosophy has began to talk about biopolitics. This condition means the general dissolution of the borders between economical and political, the spheres of life and politics which, for example, both Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben regard as the decisive event of modernity and the absolute condition for thinking politics today. I argue that this condition is as absolute for understanding economy as it is for thinking politics today. What defines economy and our experience of it today is that the bare humanness of human beings, that general potentiality and linguistic-relational abilities which distinguish human beings is revealing itself as the essence also of economic production. I will first concentrate on the dissolution of the borders between the spheres of economy and politics according to Michel Foucault's notion of biopower. I will then define in what way is this entrance of life into political order bound up with the development of capitalism more precisely, and finally outline general economy as the multitude's entrance into production which leads to a necessary rearticulation of its starting point: the very idea of biopolitics.

The modern economy confined in its distinct and self-contained bounds has come to an end. Economy cannot be conceived within the time or place of the 'factory-office'. It has rather become spatially boundless and temporally endless: it is impossible to make the distinction between working time and free time, it is difficult to say where or when the actual act of production is being carried out, what is work and what is not, what creates value and what does not. Economy has broken out from its restricted form and become general in the same sense that political has become biopolitical: it has reached the zone of indistinction between poiesis and praxis, labour and action, life and politics, communication and the faculty of language in general. This zone of indistinction where there are no borderlines between labour and action, working time and the time of life is the source of the crisis of the restricted economy where its conception of time and value can no longer grasp 'that' which creates value. To ask what is this crisis about is to ask what is *multitudo*, the multitude.

To ask what is multitude means to return to the first questions of political economy in a condition where the bare humanness of human beings, that general potentiality and linguistic-relational abilities which *distinguish* human beings, is revealing itself as the essence also of economic production: this is, I would like to argue, what defines economy and our experience of it today. We must therefore try to think economy again

now as its restricted determination has lost coherence and we are able to look our *ability to do anything* directly into the eye. We must again ask ‘what’ is it, in fact, that creates value, and how?

As I try to show multitude is not a poetic notion, but the simple name of the productive singularities whose productivity cannot be reduced to actual production. Paraphrasing Marx, we might call it ‘living labour’. As a power, which is not reducible to any specific act, to any specific mode of existence or to any historical time, living labour is multitude’s mode of being. It is activity that does not materialize into machinery or products but rather retreats from materiality and turning into actual products. This is precisely how we might describe the transformation of economy: from the confined or restricted economy where it was necessary to distinguish between work and leisure, production and reproduction, life and politics to general economy; where factory-office and its borders have dissolved into society; where the “foundation of productivity is no longer in the capitalistic investment but in the investment of the social brains... where the maximal amount of freedom and the breaking of the disciplinary relations becomes the absolute foundation of creating wealth” (Negri, 1998: 139-140).

Thus, to ask ‘what is multitude?’ means not to affirm ‘the end of work’ nor, on the contrary, to announce that ‘everything has become work’, but rather to change the principles of assessment, to change the way of conceiving the ‘the value of value’. This revaluation is not a solution to a problem but rather an opening of potential: it reveals the nature of multitude as a question. Without this questioning multitude will remain abstract, deprived of meaning, or of what Deleuze calls ‘intuition’ – and we would thus be unable to determine its conditions, to expose false problems and to discover variables under which the problem of economy must today be stated correctly.¹

Entrance of Life into History

In the Classical world the simple, natural life, the fact of living (*zoē*), which was common to all living beings (animals, human beings, gods), was plainly marginal from the perspective of the way of living proper to an individual or a group, that is, from a qualified life, the good life (*bios*).²

As a living being, man’s place was in *oikos* (dwelling, home, household) and as a political subject it was in *polis* (city-state, body of citizens). The entire Aristotelian tradition is quite clear that this was a difference constituted already in human nature: in so far as man was to realize his nature as a political animal, as a ‘living being who has language’, this was to take place in the *polis*, the community. Politics was almost as if the difference between the fact of living and good life, the place were mute life

1 For the true and false problems see Deleuze (1994: 157-164; 1988: 15-34).

2 It is on the basis of this distinction that Aristotle, for example, defines *polis* in the beginning of *Politics*: “[*polis* is] born with regard to life, but existing essentially with regard to good life” (*Politics*, 1252b: 29-30). It is also in this sense that Aristotle stresses the difference between *politikos* (statesman) vs. *oikonomos* (head of an estate) and *despotēs* (master of the family) who are both concerned with the reproduction and subsistence of life (*Politics I*, 1252a: 5-10).

(realizing itself in the *oikos*) transformed itself into good life, that is, into political life that took place in language: political order was constituted on the humanness of living man, on his having a language, not on the fact of living itself, on him having a voice.³

Both Agamben and Foucault agree that we can no longer distinguish between the simple fact of living (*zoē*) and the good life (*bios*); between our biological life as living beings and our political existence; between what is incommunicable and mute (or has only a voice), and what is communicable and sayable (or whose place is in language). We are animals in whose politics our very life as living beings is at stake: “for millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living man with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault, 1990: 143). Life ‘as such’, set apart from its different forms – an idea impossible in the Greek and Roman tradition – now becomes the centre of political order.

Foucault analyses this entrance of life into the sphere of *polis* with his concept of biopower. According to Foucault, the ‘entrance of life into history’ – that is, the entry of phenomena particular to the life of the human species into the sphere of political techniques (the order of knowledge and power) – is begun at the moment when economy (*oikonomia*, the management of family and household) and politics (the government of *polis*) integrate. Life becomes the centre of politics at the moment when economy – at the time understood as *oikonomia*, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the household (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children and servants) and of making the family fortunes prosper – is introduced to politics, the minute attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state.⁴ This is *political economy* in the original sense of the

3 It is not by chance that this passage of the *Politics* situates the place of *polis* in the transformation from voice to language: “Among living beings only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other living beings [...]. But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have a sensation of the good and the bad and of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings, and the community of these things makes dwelling and the city” (*Politics I*, 1253a: 10-18). The humanity of living man becomes thus determined in the ‘politization’ of life. The animal who has language is the political animal. This is the original tie between politics and metaphysics. See Agamben (1998: 7); Virno (2003: 31-32).

4 Agamben’s starting point is that Foucault’s theses about the birth of biopower is substantially correct: the decisive event of modernity is the introduction of *oikonomia* into politics and the entry on bare life (*la nuda vita*) in the sphere of *polis*. But what is important is the sense in which the change is understood. By analysing in more detail Aristotle’s definition of polities as the distinction between bare life and good life (*Politics*: 1252b) and thus in a sense as if a place where life must acquire its ‘goodness’ (become political), Agamben argues that the juxtaposition in fact includes the former (bare life) in the latter (politics) by excluding it and that the exclusion of bare life is thus the constituting act of the *polis* of free men. Analysing Roman law and Hobbes’s justification of sovereignty, Agamben comes to the conclusion that in the last instance sovereign power has in fact always been founded on bare life: Western politics has been biopolitics from the beginning. According to Agamben, Foucault’s thesis must therefore be at least amended since the inclusion of the fact of living into politics is not an exclusive character of modern politics but constitutes rather the original nucleus of sovereign power. By placing biological life at the centre of its calculations, the modern state does nothing else but reveal this hidden tie between power and life and confirm the alliance of modern power with the most ancient of the secrets of government: life has always been its negative foundation. The structure within which bare life is separated from and included in politics

syntagma: economy understood as government and government understood as economy.⁵

General Economy: Economy as Government of Life

The attempt to set up an economy at the level of the state found its form in the eighteenth century Sweden-Finland organized around the question of the *Oeconomie* or *Allmänna hushållningen*, that is, ‘general householding’ or ‘general economy’.⁶ General economy was the general framework for organizing everything that directly and indirectly pursued the internal material and spiritual welfare of the state: it was about “all the ground rules that in some way affect the happiness of people.”⁷ The ‘internal welfare’ of the state refers here to the distinction between the positive general householding or *Politie* (*Polizei* in German, *police* in French and English), the means for increasing the forces of the state from within, and *Statsklokheten* or *Politik* (*politique* in French, politics in English), which ensures and develops the forces of the state through a system of alliances and organizing an armed apparatus.⁸ General householding had three parts which included all the measures, departments and facilities aiming to improve general well-being and making sure that everything in the state took place according to the appropriate order:

and made this way the bearer of sovereign power has always the form of the *state of exception* (Carl Schmitt) or the *ban* (Jean-Luc Nancy). The state of exception is essentially power of maintaining itself in relation to something with which there is no relation. What is banned is both surrendered to its alterity and at the same time consigned to the mercy of the one abandoning it – separated and at the same time captured. The ban relation ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power.

- 5 For example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes in his famous encyclopedia article on ‘Political economy’ (1755) that first of all the word ‘economy’ can only properly be used to signify the wise government for the common welfare of all and that this is its actual and original use since the word ‘economy’ comes from *oikos*, house, and from *nomos*, law, but the problem is how to introduce it, *mutatis mutandis*, into the general running of the great family, which is the state. Rousseau calls this ‘general economy’ (*économie générale*).
- 6 In his lectures on the birth of biopower Foucault’s material consisted, as he himself put it, mainly of writings on government in Italy and Germany from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century; that is, in countries which encountered the most hardship in getting established as nation states. But more precisely these writings were writings on economy, on economy as general government, that is, on economy as understood at the time. The use of the material from Sweden-Finland here allows us to confirm that Foucault was not simply dealing with some odd writers here and there but that – and in accordance with Foucault’s methodology – surprisingly few things are thought and said in a certain period of time given their potentially limitless possibilities. See e.g. Foucault (1974).
- 7 “The science of General Householding is about all the ground rules that in some way affect the happiness of people – except those that concern those rights, connections and obligations by which states are dependent of one another, as these belong to the state wisdom [*statsklokheten*]” (Berch, 1747: 11). Berch was the first professor of the science of *oeconomie* (Jurisprudence, Oeconomie & Commerciel) in Sweden appointed at Uppsala University in 1741. The first chair in ‘Oeconomie, Politia und Cameralwissenschaften’ was established in 1727 in Halle, Germany.
- 8 Foucault (1991: 104; 1997: 68) calls the latter ensemble of political knowledge and technology the ‘diplomatico-military technology’. In this distinction lies the origin of the modern idea of the sphere of pure politics (between the states), or politics as such (but also economy as such, the social as such, etc.), an idea quite impossible for the Greeks for whom warfare, for example, was an integral element of *oikonomia*.

1. *Politia (Ordningswärket)* looked after the order that the happiness and prosperity of the state required among its members, in their endeavours and in their way of life. Its tasks were to see to the order of society, take measures to increase the population and guide their activities towards worthwhile sources of livelihood, take care of health, vaccinations etc. The happiness of people consisted of the bounties of spirit, body and fortune: (a) *Politia* concerning *anima bona* facilitated and organized the religious service, upbringing and education; it looked after the way of life and supervision of those deeds that had to do with will, as well as public entertainment, luxury and games; (b) *Politia* concerning *corporis bona* concentrated on the issues of health: diseases, epidemics, and taking care of tidiness, housing, living and controlling the use and trade of medicines; (c) *Politia* concerning *fortunae bona* took care of general security and comfort, made sure that vagabonds and beggars are not on the streets, and included the issues of censorship, means of transport, roads and postal office.
2. *Oeconomie* focused on those rules on which the means of living had to be based on in order not to harm one another and to produce prosperity to society as a whole: farming, mining operations, handicrafts, trade.
3. *Cammar Hushållningen* again attained, collected and managed state income. It dealt with those means by which the necessary revenues may be collected and the circulation of money may be directed in order to enhance the beneficial ways of living, commerce and trade. The aim was not only to make the taxing department rich but to make sure that the inhabitants are in such a condition that the state may collect revenues from them.

In short, general economy included *everything*.⁹ It included the positive, active, productive aspects of life like education and useful occupations. But it also included the negative aspects of life: the poor and the unemployed, diseases, epidemics, accidents,

9 To give another example, in his lectures on the theory of Oeconomie in the autumn of 1754 Pehr Kalm distinguishes the following components of general economy: *Oeconomia publica cameralis*: takes care of income without burdening the people and seeing to that it is righteously distributed; *Oeconomia publica ruralis*: farming, agriculture, building code, land laws; *Oeconomia publica metallurgia*: mining operations; *Oeconomia publica opificiorum*: handicrafts, manufacture, markethall rights; *Oeconomia publica commerciorum*: laws and measures to improve trade so that more things are exported abroad than imported back; *Oeconomia publica medica*: action against human and animal diseases, tabelli-department, lasarets which develop medicine and take care of the poor; *Oeconomia publica urbica*: provision in towns, trade and privileges, organizing houses and streets so as to have clean and good air, poorhouses, fire guard, seeing to that beggars don't walk on the streets and what may and may not be planted in the town land; *Oeconomia publica politica*: roads and canals, military collegial body, postal office, departments taking care of increasing the population (dividing farms, attracting foreigners by permitting privileges and freedom of religion) and advancing the its well-being and enthusiasm, encouraging fellow people to take care of householdingly healthy life and seeing to that servants won't get too high salaries. Kalm, a student of Carl von Linné, was the first professor in oeconomie in Finland appointed 1747 in Turku. Kalm is famous for his first ever comprehensive study of the American nature: *En Resa till America*, Stockholm 1753-1761 (journal of his travel to America 1748-51) translated into English in 1770 as *Travels into North America*. In his *Species Plantarum*, Linné cites Kalm for 90 species, 60 of them new. Anders Chydenius who expresses the fundamental ideas of economic liberalism in his *The National Gain* (1765) was a student of Kalm.

fires and floods. And it included that which was produced and how as well as market and trade control. It also included the control of territory, space, property, legacies, donations, roads, rivers, canals, public buildings, forests and meadows. Yet it included everything from a very particular point of view. It dealt with religion not from the point of view of dogmatic truth, but from the moral quality of life. In looking after health and supplies, it dealt with the preservation of life. Concerning trade, factories, workers, the poor and public order, it dealt with the facilities and conveniences of life; and in providing games, luxury and entertainment its object was life's pleasures. Indeed, Berch employs a remarkable expression: what general householding looks after is 'life'. No longer was government dealing with people according to their juridical statuses but with people as living, working, trading and social beings, with people having sexual relations, diseases, desires, aptitudes and will. That people survive and live – and do even better than just that – is what general householding had to ensure. Why? Because "the plentitude of decent, rich and able people is the primary strength of the state" (Kalm, 1754: 3).

The aim was to develop those elements constitutive of individuals' lives in such a way that their development also fosters that of the strength (resources) of the state. There was a new historical outlook where the nation state had emerged as a reality which needed to hold out in a competitive grid and a disputed geographical area for an indefinite length of historical time. By organizing in detail the relations of living, working, trading and desiring beings to others and to themselves, people were supplied with 'little extra life' while simultaneously the state was supplied with 'little extra strength'. The happiness of the people (understood as survival, life and improving living – the state's internal strength) was, in other words, not only dependent on fertile land and fair climate or other nature's conditions, but on the exercise of healthy householding. It was the origin of the prosperity and well-being in a state.

Healthy householding entailed more than just implementing general principles of reason and wisdom, it was not government according to divine, natural or human laws: it was not *Oeconomie Vulgarem*, the vulgar, old way of doing things, but rather rational economy, *Oeconomie Philosophicam*, an economy exercised according to the rules of an art or *Oeconomie Artificiale*, a technique conforming to certain rules. These rules did not simply pertain to customs or traditions, but to knowledge, rational knowledge, a reflection causing to observe the nature of what is governed, that is, the state and its exigencies. It was absolutely necessary to know the state and to assess its strength. What was required was concrete, precise and measured knowledge of the state's strengths and weaknesses. The strength could be calculated and appropriate, positive intervention made when the number of people and their ways of living were known (number, age, sex, livelihood, degree of reproduction, death rate and their reasons).¹⁰ Herein lies the beginning of the political question of 'population' in which population becomes

10 Political arithmetic or population statistics (science of the state) was in Sweden amongst the most developed in Europe in the eighteenth century. Both Berch and Kalm devoted great energy to developing the methods and gathering knowledge about the 'economic conditions' of the various parts of the nation. Also, the Royal Swedish Academy of Science (*Kungliga Vetenskapsakademie*) was born out of the engagement in general householding and was first going to be named as a 'Society of the Science of Economy'. In any case it was an economic society.

analyzed as a collection of elements related to the general system of living beings (human race vs. mankind) which may offer a place for a coordinated intervention.¹¹

Event Bound up with the Development of Capitalism

This bringing of life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and making knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life meant the birth of a new mode of relation between life and history, ontology and politics. It is to describe these new power relations emerging by ‘political economy’ that Foucault needed a new political theory and a new ontology.¹²

Biopower, the power over life whose function was no longer to kill and seize but to invest in life, to increase its forces and make it useful in the right way, evolved in two basic forms about which Foucault was quite formal: The first organized itself at the end of the seventeenth century and focused on the man-body, on optimizing its capabilities, multiplying its powers and usefulness while at the same time taming and controlling the forces constituting it. All this was ensured with procedures of power that Foucault called ‘disciplines’. Disciplines focused on the docility-usefulness economy of the body by means of anatomic politics: organizing and dividing a multiplicity of bodies in space, controlling their behaviour, training their movements and organizing their action in time. The second formed some fifty years later in the second half of the eighteenth century and focused not on the individual and the body but on the life of man-species, the species-body imbued with the mechanisms of life and biological processes that manifested regularities and aggregate effects such as the rate of birth and mortality, epidemics, relations between population and wealth which could no longer be reduced to the sphere of the family. The second set of procedures – which Foucault characterized as the *biopolitics* of the population – organized a set of regulative interventions on ‘population’, on its welfare, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity and all the conditions causing these to vary.

This organization of the living within the domain of emerging ideas about value and utility – rather than ascetic morality which seemed to abandon life and the living body –

11 This meant also the beginning of the reconceptualization of economy as an autonomous sphere of reality. Only the questions and development of general householding made it possible to discover problems specific to a ‘population’, which introduced its own regularities, aggregate effects, phenomena like epidemics and relations between work, habits and wealth which could not be reduced to phenomena of the family. This lead to the displacement of the question of ‘economy’ from the sphere of *oikonomia* onto another level of reality, the one we today call *economy*: from being a way of government to being an independent area of reality which expresses a rationality fundamentally different to the calculative regulation of general householding.

12 Foucault needed a new political theory and a new ontology to describe these new relations emerging by ‘political economy’ because ‘political economy’ refers not to the political economy of capital and work nor to a single source of sovereign power (as for Agamben, bare life) but to a dynamic of forces that establishes a new relationship between ontology and politics. For Foucault, the fundamental political problem of modernity is therefore the multitude of forces that act and react amongst each other. The impossibility of distinguishing between *zoe* (man as a living being) and *bios* (man as a political subject) is not the product of the action of sovereign power but the result of the action of new forces over which it has no ‘power’. Biopower and its function of ‘coordination and combination’ is most of all about the strategic coordination and organization of these relations in order to extract a surplus of power from living beings.

was, according to Foucault, the indispensable “event in the development of capitalism” (1990: 141). Capitalism as the adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. It had to have the methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. For people’s bodies and their time to become labour power and labour time, and “for there to be ‘over-profit’ (*sur-profit*), there had to be an ‘infra-power’ (*sous-pouvoir*)” (Foucault, 2000: 86, translation modified). This binding of man to labour was synthetic and political: it was a linkage brought about by power, power incompatible with the relations of sovereignty, power that permitted time and labour (rather than wealth, products and services) to be extracted from living bodies.¹³

The Relationship Between Life and Capitalism

Yet we still need to elaborate more closely what is the relationship between this event and the development of capitalism, in what way is the entrance of life into history bound up with the development of capitalism. In the heart of *Capital* Marx outlines the encounter of two elements – wealth and man – which was to form the initial phase of capitalism. This encounter was an encounter in a specific form, or more precisely an encounter without a form: a conjunction of the capacity to labour freed from the many (different, concrete, particular, material) means of employment, the constraints and guarantees of a particular form of life and that of wealth in general freed from any specific means of its investment (landed property vs. capital-money). This is also what Deleuze and Guattari call the original axiom of capitalism, the encounter of the deterritorialized worker who was free to sell his labour power and the decoded wealth which had become general capital-money.

As Marx says, Engels was right to call Adam Smith the economic Luther (Marx, 1844: 128-129; Engels, 1844: 1). Whereas Luther’s merit was to have determined the essence of religion, no longer on the side of the object, but as an interior religiosity, the merit of Adam Smith and David Ricardo was to have determined the essence or *nature of wealth* no longer as an objective nature but as an abstract and undetermined subjective essence,

13 The two forms remained separate still in the eighteenth century; the development of the first taking place in institutions like the school and army and in reflections about tactics, apprenticeship and education, while the other was developed in the analyses of the relations between resources and inhabitants and in the analyses of wealth and its circulation. But in the nineteenth and twentieth century they joined in the form of concrete arrangements like the factory and the welfare state. In terms of the wealth of the nation and the welfare of the population, the discovered relations between activities of the population and wealth meant the birth of modern economy and the consequent recentering of the rationality of the production of wealth from its circulation and exchange to its real production. Instead of exchange, labour and its organization became now the origin of value and well-being. Yet the determined steps of the welfare state to take labour power under its protection nor the factory as a solution to the organizational problem of production would not have been possible without the methods of guiding the accumulation of men, the skills of organizing the multiplicity, the means to join the powers of human bodies with principles of productivity and utility in a controlled manner.

*the activity of production in general.*¹⁴ Let me dwell on this man–wealth relationship for a moment, because it is the key to understanding the bond between life and the development of capitalism. The capitalistic relation of production is based on the difference between actual labour and labour power in general (measured by its effective use) which displaces *wealth* into a relation with the human activity of production in general – a distinction and a displacement possible only by the beginning of the order of knowledge called political economy.

Theory of Wealth in General Householding

For the Renaissance ‘economists’ the ability of money to measure commodities and to be exchanged (its exchangeability) rested upon its intrinsic value: fine metal was in itself a mark of wealth. It had a price because its intrinsic character was an indication of the wealth of the world: it was precious above all other things because it was itself wealth. For this reason it could be used as a measure of all prices and for this reason it could be exchanged (used as a substitution) for anything that had a price.

The ‘theory of wealth’ contained in eighteenth century general householding broke down this circle of preciousness. The objective of general householding was to increase the power of the state. One of the most important aspects of this power was wealth and its main sources were thought of as the colonies, the conquest and the surplus on the balance of trade. But wealth was not, as often claimed, simply equated with specie. Wealth – the one pole constituting the happiness of the state – was rather split into elements (objects of needs and desire marked by necessity, utility, pleasure or rarity) that can be substituted for one another by the interplay of the coinage that signifies them. In other words, the analysis is turned upside down: money can be used as a measure of wealth, and it receives a price because it could be exchanged (used as a substitution): gold is precious because it is money and money has value because it has properties (physical, not economic) that render it adequate for the task of representing wealth. Its ability to measure wealth and its capacity to receive a price were qualities that derived from its exchanging function.¹⁵

Money became now the instrument of the representation of wealth and wealth a content represented by money: wealth became now whatever was the object of needs and desires (marked by necessity, utility, pleasure or rarity), and money gained the power of representing all possible wealth. All wealth was coinable – by the means of which it entered circulation. Money was, in other words, that which permitted wealth to be represented, and without it wealth would remain immobile, useless or, as it were, ‘silent’. The value of things will therefore no longer proceed from the metal itself, but establishes itself according to the criteria of utility, pleasure or rarity which combines the forms of wealth (objects of needs and desire) one with another while money permits their real exchange.

14 In their topology Deleuze and Guattari (1972: 270) add here also Freud who had determined the essence or nature of desire no longer in a relation to objects, aims, or even sources but as an abstract subjective essence, that is, libido or sexuality.

15 For a detailed analysis of the mercantilist conception of wealth, see Foucault (1974: 166-200).

The mercantilist theory of value made it possible to explain how certain objects can be introduced into a system of exchanges, but value was based on a total system of equivalency and the ability of things to represent one and another. This allows Foucault to conclude that for the mercantilists value was a sign. Therefore the emphasis in general householding is on the positive balance of trade: money is needed to represent wealth, that is, to attract it, to bring it in from abroad or manufacture it at home, and it is needed to make wealth pass from hand to hand in the process of exchange. It is important to import money and trade alone is able of producing this effect. The money accumulated is not intended to sleep and grow fat, but it is attracted into a state only so that it may be consumed by the process of exchange. Money became wealth only in so far as it fulfilled its representative function (in replacing commodities). The relations between wealth and money were now based on circulation and exchange and no longer on the preciousness of metal.¹⁶

Production of Value in Political Economy

Political economy displaces the notion of wealth from this orbit of exchange and circulation – where wealth represented objects of desire, money represented wealth, and exchange was the source of fine metal/money – by breaking wealth down according to the units of *labour* that have in reality produced it.

Smith and Ricardo did not invent labour as an economic concept, but they revealed it to possess a power to establish a constant measure between the values of things. We can find the concept of labour already, for example, in Cantillion (utilitarian psychological theory) and Quesnay (physiocrats) connected in the same way to the subjective essence of wealth and used as a means of analyzing exchangeable wealth ('value in exchange' of things).¹⁷ But even if the distinction between 'value in use' and 'value in exchange' of things had already been made and the quantity of labour had been already used as a measurement of the latter, the quantity of labour inscribed in the price of things had been only a relative measure. A man's labour was in the end equal to the value of the quantity of the nourishment necessary to maintain him and his family for as long as a given task lasted (Cantillion, 1755: 17-18). In other words, a need (for food, clothing, housing) still defined the measure of the price: necessity was the measure of equivalences.¹⁸

Smith and Ricardo revealed labour to possess a power to establish a constant measure between the values of things. For the wealth represented no longer the objects of need and desire but labour. *Labour* as the measure that established equalities and differences was of a different nature from *need*. It was no longer linked to individual desires,

16 Herein lies also the economic sense of general householding: the amount and happiness of inhabitants must grow for there to be an abundance of workers for the manufacturing industry to draw on. This way the wages or prices will not increase at a greater rate than wealth and there will be a positive balance of trade. Yet the amount of specie must grow for the products of land and industry to be remunerated, wages to be sufficient and the population not to remain in poverty: hence measures to encourage foreign trade and maintain a positive balance are needed.

17 See, for example, Cantillion (1755) and Quesnay (1758).

18 The privilege accorded to agricultural production, wheat and land by the physiocrats was based on the measure of the prices thought of basically as food; see Foucault (1974: 222)

modified by them or variable like them: it was an *absolute measure*, not dependent upon men's desires and appetites. Although Smith still understood wealth as the objects of need representing themselves in the movements and methods of exchange, he formulated a principle of order based on the *working day* that at once patterns and uses up man's life. The equivalence of the objects of need and desire is no longer established in the intermediary of other objects and other desires, but by a transition to that which is radically heterogeneous to them: life's subjection to time (Smith, 1937: Book I). Smith distinguishes between the reason for exchange (we have needs) and the measurement of that which is exchangeable (by labour that went into its making), between the nature of what is exchanged and the units that enable it to be broken down (units of labour that have been invested in the objects in question). Even if men experience that what they exchange as 'indispensable, commodious or pleasurable', for Smith what actually circulates in the form of things is labour – not objects of needs representing one another, but worker's time and toil, transformed, concealed, forgotten. This invention made it possible to achieve an equivalence in the exchange of objects of need whose standardization would have otherwise been exposed to change and relativity.

But whereas Smith still tended to equate labour as productive activity with labour as commodity that can be bought and sold, Ricardo finally exploded this unity by distinguishing clearly the activity of production in general, the *worker's capacity to labour* that is bought and sold and the *labour actually done* (the actual activity of extracting metal, producing commodities, manufacturing objects, transporting merchandise, etc.). For Ricardo, the quantity of labour makes it possible to determine the value of a thing not because the thing is representable in units of work but because labour is the 'source of all value'. Value, in other words, ceases to be a sign and becomes a product (Ricardo, 1821: Ch. 1; see also Foucault, 1974: 254).

Ricardo does not locate the *source of wealth* in exchange or in the positive balance of trade as in the case of general householding (or in a specific type of labour as the physiocrats did with agricultural labour), but in the *capacity for subjective productive activity in general*. For Ricardo, value is determined by the cost of abstract productive activity in general. The common element that makes exchange values commensurable, i.e. which is expressed by exchange value, is labour. The quantity of labour determines the quantity of each exchange value. But as all labour is different – concrete, material, particular, incommensurable – the only labour that can be viewed purely quantitatively is abstract labour, "the human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure" (Marx, 1887: Part I, Ch. 1, Section 1).

The essence of the question of the relationship between man and wealth is, in other words, not in the productivity of actual labour but in the *exchangeability of the potential to work in general*. This potential to work, that is, human labour power (as the activity of production in general) which is indifferent to its means and objects and capable of being employed anywhere, becomes now articulated as the basis of the production of wealth in capitalism.

What is Labour Power?

According to Marx, labour power means the general potential to produce, "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the

living personality, of a human being” (Marx, 1887: Part II, Ch. 6). In other words, it refers to a general human ability or capacity without regard to any specific task or assignment. It is potentiality for anything: anything may be expected from it. Labour power refers to the general human potential to produce which must be distinguished from the effectual production just like the capacity for digestion must be distinguished from actual digestion.¹⁹ Labour power’s mode of being could in this sense said to be that of potentiality, *dynamis*, the fundamental category of philosophical thought which is, according to Aristotle, the mode in which human beings exist in so far as they know and produce (1933: 1045b-1046a). With the question of labour power we are, in other words, confronted with human being as a purely potential being – without any function, *ergon*, not engaged in actual activity, *energeia*.²⁰

Potentiality as the ontological condition, the species-being of human animal is always distinct from its particular acts, from the mediation of some use or justification (that is, history). It is always something non-present but yet real, characterized by *adynamia*, impotentiality, the power not to pass into actuality.²¹ What characterizes potentiality is its dwelling outside of any function – its opposition to *energeia*, actuality – its dwelling outside ‘history’: it tends towards surpassing its own time, its own historical situation in which it is never fully translated. It is always in a way outside history, withdrawn from historical time in which it is never fully exhausted. This means that this power cannot be completely actualized in a particular task, a single man or in any particular community of men. It is as if it resides in a multitude of mankind; it is the sociality of the ‘social individual’. The experience of this potential character of life is always an experience of a common power, a general power. Multitude and the potential character of life identify with one another without a residue because the indwelling of commonness to any power is a function of the necessarily potential nature of any community. In multitude there is always something which remains potential and impotent, non-actualized and non-mediated. This impotentiality is its power which makes it general, unfailing and absolute. Or to put it sociologically: the social is included potentially in the individual, but it is expressed from the point of view of the particular (singular). It is always a multiplicity (contains all the relations) and a singularity (expresses a part of those relations).

The foundation of ‘labour power’ cannot therefore be said to be in any particular technological invention or in any particular technique like for example large-scale industry or division of work. As Marx writes, “to discover the various uses of things is

19 “When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not speak of labour, any more than when we speak of capacity for digestion, we speak of digestion. The latter process requires something more than a good stomach” (Marx, 1887: Part II, Ch. 6).

20 Aristotle derives *energeia* from *ergon* (function, task, work). *En-ergeia* is the state of being in work, functioning (*Metaphysics*: 1050a). Aristotle ties here in also the related notion of *telos* (end, completion, purpose). Because *ergon* is the completed, *energeia* is related to *entelecheia* (being in the state of completion): *energeia* is the functioning of a *dynamis* (potentiality, capacity), its fulfillment and actualization, normally accompanied with pleasure. From this follows that potentiality is contrary to pleasure, that what is never enacted, what never achieves its end. If pleasure, according to Aristotle’s definition, never takes place in time, potentiality is then essentially *duration*.

21 The essence of potentiality is the relation it has with its own privation, *steresis*, its non-being. See Agamben (1999) for a discussion of potentiality in exceptional clarity. See also Kirkeby (1999).

the work of history. So also is the establishment of socially-recognized standards of measure for the quantities of these useful objects" (Marx, 1887: Part I, Ch. 1, Sect. 1). In other words, history is made of carrying into effect, or actualising, different ways of use. Labour power is above all the category in which the potential and common mode of existence of human beings as such – freed from any particular form of employment and all traditional codes – *enters history*; that is, in which it is articulated into 'use', into the historical order of knowledge and power that constitutes capitalism.²² Capital is in other words a social relation based upon history 'in itself'.

The Commodity Form of the Production of Value

The capitalistic society is the first to place in its centre the a-historical, untimely potentiality which must be distinguished from history. This 'nonhistorical core' is without a place or function within society but without it there would be no change.²³ But productive activity in general enters economy only in a specific form, or, more precisely, it acquires its particular historical function (production of surplus value) only enclosed in a particular form, the commodity form, the form in which it can be sold and purchased.

In being measured by its actual use (articulated as a proportion of time, an hour or a day of its expenditure) labour power, as something potential and incommensurable, becomes commensurable (a homogenous temporal substance, common as abstract labour), a thing, a commodity among others which may be bought and sold. Yet labour power cannot be reduced to its particular value: it is at once the form of equivalence and the form of productive power. In other words, it is a special commodity because it can surpass its own limits: what is essential is its power not to pass into actuality, its ability to overstep its own limits, its ability to create surplus value. Herein lies the mystery of the origin of capitalist accumulation, the origin of surplus value: labour power seems like a commodity among others; it can be bought and sold and its existence and use seem in no way to break the rules of commodity exchange. In being purchased it seems that what is purchased is actual labour, fulfilled action, but the use of labour power to a task, its process of consumption, is always at the same time the production process of

22 Paolo Virno (2004: 84) has underlined that to understand the rational core of the concept biopolitics we should indeed start with labour power. The potential as such is at the core of the exchange between capitalist and the worker. The commodity for sale (the generic ability to work) is something which, in and of itself, does not have an autonomous spatio-temporal existence. But when something which exists only as possibility is sold, this something is not separable from the living person of the seller: "the use value the worker has to offer (to the capitalist) for others in general is not materialized in a product, it does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really, but only in potentiality, as his capacity" (Marx, 1973: 267). In other words, the living body becomes now the object of organization, not for its intrinsic value or for the purpose of increasing its strengths and happiness, but because it embodies labour power as the aggregate of the diverse human faculties. The living body is the material container of a yet unrealized potential or as Marx puts it: 'labour as subjectivity'. Life becomes managed and controlled as such because it acts as the embodiment of the bare faculty to produce which takes on the form of a commodity. In other words, labour power is the original category in which life in general, life without any particular task, enters economy. Biopower means this coming of the potential dimension of human existence into immediate experience.

23 On the difference between history and change, see Deleuze (1990: 170; 1993: 116). Deleuze calls the untimely also *dehors temporal*, the 'temporal outside', outside as a vital, recurring element. The vitalism is here not organic but temporal; see Deleuze (1998: 96).

surplus value: in the consumption process the produced value is greater than the value of labour power (price by which it is purchased). In the *commodity form* the activity of production in general and its organization into history – the power that ties it to the system of commodity exchange and division of labour (certain historical structures) – are intertwined: “The process of production, considered on the one hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of creating value, is production of commodities; considered on the other hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of producing surplus-value, it is the capitalist process of production, or capitalist production of commodities” (Marx, 1887: Part III, Ch. 7, Sect. 2).

As Agamben notices, and as Guy Debord also realises, for Marx, the key to understanding the spellbound of capitalism is the commodity form: the commodity, in so far as it is a commodity, actualizes a social relation. In the commodity form the social constituent of labour power (mutual relations between people) acquires a concrete existence as a thing. Commodity “is a sensuous thing which is at the same time suprasensible or social”: it contains or commodifies something in common (Marx, 1887, Part I, Section I, Ch. 1; see also Agamben, 2000: 75; Debord, 1990). That which makes different use values or useful articles exchangeable is *value*: the ‘secret’ or ‘soul’ of the commodity. It is that something ‘in common’: the exchangeability, social character, mutual relations contained in it. The communicativeness or exchangeability of the commodity as such does not concern the particular use of the commodity (of a coat, for example), and neither does it concern the actual, concrete labour (designing, cutting, sawing etc.) that went into its making. Above all value is to do with the relation between commodities (their exchangeability) and hence with the relation between people. Value embodies and makes real something abstract, something suprasensible.

But in order for value – this something suprasensible or social – to acquire concrete existence, it must acquire a corporeal form in the use value of another commodity which Marx calls the ‘value form’: it is the concrete form of its (suprasensible) value behind which sociality, the exchangeability in itself (the social character and mutual relations), now becomes hidden. The commodity, in so far as it is a commodity, actualizes in this double form a social relation (something in common): it is a sensuous thing which is at the same time suprasensible or social. This means that the suprasensible social constituent of a commodity, the relation where it contains general social labour (cooperation, mutual relations between people, the social form of work) manifests itself now in a thing-form, in the use value of another commodity. In production based on exchange value, that is, in the commodity form of the production of value, the social relation takes in this way the form of the relation between things. In the world of commodity exchange people do not enter into direct relation with one another, but only through the indirect mediation of commodities, things or information. The direct presence, immediate being and cooperation of people as such must be mediated or actualized by things (meanings etc.) to have value and to be ‘productive’. It is only by this precondition, by a mediation which can be distinguished from actual cooperation, that cooperation between people is productive and has value within the realm of the production of value in the commodity form. It is this arrangement of mediation that is now in crisis.

The Entrance of Multitude into Production

Today firms are laying off employees, shutting production plants, transferring production to subcontractors and to countries where the production costs are low – in short, they are turning into *firms without factories*. What is this change about? It is not about pleasing the shareholders by increasing the dividends or raising the market price of the firm. Nor is the question here of an attempt to save the welfare state and the jobs at its foundation by decreasing the price of work, by prolonging the working hours or by eliminating the non-incentive qualities of employment.

Rather, the logic of the production of value has changed: work in the traditional sense of the word, and the factory as the corresponding model of production, have converted into mere costs which must be eliminated from the system. In turning into firms without factories companies do not bring down their entire operations but rather concentrate on those which produce more profit more quickly in comparison to the production of thing-form commodities within the factory model (see Lazzarato in this issue). At the same time work, in its traditional sense, has lost its position as an important generator of social cohesion. And there is no return. The defenders of ‘wagework’ and the ones building their society on the institutions based on it are the Don Quixotes of today.

In the ‘Fragment on Machines’, which is the logical culmination and the highpoint of the antagonistic dialectic used in the *Grundrisse* (between synchronic construction and historical determination), Marx (1973) thinks about this displacement of manufacturing labour in the production of wealth as a ‘natural development’ of capital.²⁴ The development of capital proceeds to its ‘last phase’ because it itself begets a change in the nature of the production of value which causes the collapse of production based on exchange value. According to Marx, the reason for this displacement is that at a point of this development it is likely that thinking and abstract knowledge will replace manufacturing labour as the most important force of production: knowledge replaces partitioned and repetitive labour, that is, industrial society and the society based on the division of labour in its traditional form. As a consequence of this transformation, it is neither direct human labour the worker performs (shaping materials of nature, production of new objects etc.) nor the time during which she or he works (the unit of this), but rather “the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body – it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth” (Marx, 1973: 705). In other words, the mere existence of human being as a human being and not as a performer of a particular task or as a member of a particular community (that is, man as such, man without any content) becomes now the foundation-stone of wealth. This is not to say that direct labour and factory production disappear but for the production of value they have become, as Marx puts it, a ‘miserable base’.²⁵

24 The fragment is written at the end of February 1858 and it covers the last pages of Notebook VI and the beginning of Notebook VII. See also Piironen in this issue.

25 In describing this transformation and the emerging ‘new foundation of value’ Marx uses the term *general intellect* (Marx 1973: 706). The concept of general intellect or *understanding in general*, as

Man without Content

Knowledge and communicative abilities of human being have become an important force of production. At least in the financial economy *collective opinion*, or what Keynes called the convention, is decisive with regard to individual beliefs and opinions. According to studies on investment behaviour, what is important in the functioning of collective opinion is not so much that what is communicated (the information content), but the way in which that what is regarded as a wise investment decision by ‘others’ is communicated (the communication ‘in itself’) (e.g. Marazzi, 2002 and this issue; Orlean, 1999; Schiller, 2000; Shefrin, 2001; Keynes, 1973). It is the nature of financial markets to function on the basis of *imitation*: to function properly the financial economy depends on the mass behaviour whose point of origin is in the deficit of information. Imitation begins where information ends: imitation is not about any specific information or activity but about the absence of information or specific activity. According to Jussi Vähämäki, imitation seems to indicate the specific mental ‘place’ where value is today created: typical imitative or mimetic behaviour takes place when people run in the same direction where the others are running not knowing why they are running and where the others are going. They trust that the others know as the others trust that they know. Such trust does not have any positive content as information: it is based on *general expectations* of how people in general act or think. The deficit of information constrains people to navigate in the world with the help of these most elementary human faculties – ‘instincts’, as it were – which do not contain or transmit any specific information (see Vähämäki in this issue).

Herein lies the reason why today’s financial techniques, derivatives, stock trend analyses and the attempts to calculate and feel the market sentiment seem to have very little to do with modern economics and its conception of value. The new financial techniques are statistical techniques but these statistics try to translate into time series corporeal measures (to buy, to sell) and intensities (desires and beliefs): they try to express social relations as tendencies and variations which is the only way to seize and regulate the unforeseeable character of the social in itself diffused by imitation, contagion and reproduction beyond any physical intercourse.²⁶ In other words, these techniques do not perform any specific act of communication or exchange of information but try rather to repeat and imitate a relation to the world. They seek an

elaborated for example in *Luogo Comune* (e.g. no. 4, 1993), points to an ensemble of productive powers that constitutes the new centre of social production and organizes its vital dimensions a priori. It points at those general human abilities which are necessary to any act of production. General intellect and those general conditions of being a human being characterizing it organize not only the process of life but come now to organize also the production process directly. In other words, man ‘as such’, his or her entire personality and essential potentiality (‘to do anything’) becomes a means of production, a machine that replaces fixed capital and displaces into margins the knowledge that has materialized into machinery systems or automation (knowledge objectified in fixed capital).

26 Because of their nature and number, these ‘market acts’, intensities and tendencies are not in any way ‘disciplinable’. They cannot be organized or controlled in space – only a probabilistic treatment can ensure their regulation and appropriation: they take place in time not in space, they can be determined only in time, not in space. Lazzarato (1997) suggests that here it is not enough to talk about drawing a cartograph of society but rather a courbograph (a graph of curves) because a map gives always a static image of what occurs while here we are talking about the description of dynamic temporality of the tendencies, of intensities, of seizing the social as an event.

absolute identification with the social. Such identification requires a technique or a man ‘without content’, a kind of general ability imitate, to perform any task or any role.

But these general abilities, or the *man without content*, plays a central role also in the transformations of the organization of the production process: knowledge and communication have an increasingly central and direct role also there.²⁷ Today’s production is not mute or silent. Language and the means of communication are the tools in common to every productive act: the labourer is and must be talkative. Indeed, the organization of production may today be described empirically as a complex of communication and linguistic acts. It no longer consists in the silent and solitary accomplishment of a particular task, product or objective, but rather in the continuous modulation, variation and intensification of social cooperation that occurs through interaction and linguistic performances which, far from giving rise to a final product, exhaust themselves in the communicative interaction that their own ‘performance’ brings about. As Paolo Virno has demonstrated, ‘communicative action’ does not hold any privileged or even exclusive place in politics or in the struggle for ‘mutual recognition’. On the contrary, the dialogic word is installed at the very heart of capitalist production: labour *is* interaction (Virno, 2001).

On the other hand, work is becoming more and more independent and personal in the sense that the personal character and capabilities of the worker – not what she or he does, but what she or he *is* – are becoming increasingly decisive to the production process: the distinctions between the worker and the working assignment, between working time and free time have begun to blur. Compared to ‘old work’, where personality was a handicap, which the division of work and organization tried to demolish, today’s work is rather a subjective attitude, the worker’s skills indistinguishable from his or her personality and habits, aptitudes and experience. Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish what somebody does today at the level of external traits of work. Yet, even if the external or visible characteristics of work look similar (a writer, a manager, a social worker, an architect, a factory worker all seem to be doing the same things with the same tools), the know-how and experience are not at all equal: the work is intellectually different, it requires different education, upbringing, experience. It requires differences in all the things that make one a distinct person, but that do not show at the level of the external characters of work. The worker can no longer just mechanically perform a particular task, but he or she must rather put to work his or her feelings, senses and perception: it is impossible to say which part of such immaterial (e.g. managerial or caring) labour is part of production and which an expression of personality. It is also difficult to say where the actual act of production is being carried out: when is it time to work and when time to rest; when and where does one work and when and where not? The specific places and times of production have

27 The division between the *real economy* where material and immaterial commodities are produced and sold and the *financial economy* where speculation directs investment decisions must be completely rethought. In general economy language and communication rather penetrate structurally and at the same time both the financial sector and the production and distribution of commodities and services. The recent changes in the nature of work and the explosion of the global stock markets in the end of 1990’s are two sides of the same phenomenon: the communicative turn of economy. For an elegant refusal to interpret the recent extreme volatility of the stock markets as an evidence of the growing independence of financial capital from the real processes of economy, see Marazzi (2002).

disappeared and production has instead become *spatially boundless and temporally endless* (Vähämäki, 2003).

Together the communicative nature and independence of work seem to have transformed production into the worker's self-expression, into the creation of her or his self and transmitting it to others which shifts the centre of production from material production into relationships and contexts. Cooperation and interaction are in themselves part of production, no longer something imposed from the outside: it is not the same thing to be coordinated 'externally' and to invent and produce cooperative relations oneself. When the relationship with others becomes the driving, essential element and not something accessory, and thus the solitary and restricted character (exclusion of communication from the production process) of labour dies away, production necessarily needs a *publicly organized space*.

A 'publicly organized space' means the necessity of a presence of others and a relationship with the presence of others (the ability to relate to the presence of others, the ability to communicate, cooperate etc.). It means the sharing of communicative and cognitive abilities, a linguistic organization whose essence is in the communication not of something commensurable (information) but of the ability to communicate itself, of the communicativity itself. In short, what has always been thought to be the condition of political life now also becomes the condition of economic production: the boundaries between the economic and the political, poiesis and praxis, life and politics begin to dissolve. Rather than 'the economy colonializing the life world', the characteristics that have always been thought to belong to the 'outside' of economy, to the sphere of art and politics (as in classical philosophy), or to the sphere of ideology and superstructure (as in political economy and its critique), turn out as the essence of economy.

The Immediately Social Nature of Value

According to Paolo Virno, the distinction between the spheres of politics (political life, good life, action whose origin and purpose is in itself) and economy (labour, the sphere of instrumental action and the necessities of life) begins to blur precisely when the elementary human faculties (the general conditions of being a human being) as a primary productive force cease to be 'private' and inconspicuous and become publicly organized, a matter of organization in general (Virno, 2004: 64). This change in the nature of the means of production is maybe best characterized as a change in the nature of *real abstraction*. For Marx, money or an act of exchange of labour power is a 'real abstraction': it makes real an abstract thought, the idea of equivalency. An actual act (the sale and purchase of labour power) expresses and makes real a structure of a bare thought. It has the validity, the value only of a thought. This is what a real abstraction is: a thought becoming actualized, a thought becoming a thing (see Virno, 1996: 23; 2004: 64).

The directly social nature of value or the *Vergesellschaftung* of labour and production, however, changes the relation: it indicates no longer that a certain reality (a sale and purchase of labour power, for example) had the value and validity of a thought, but that it is now our thoughts in themselves that acquire the value of 'actual' or 'material' facts without the necessity of any mediation or a corporeal form in the value form. Our thoughts, understanding in general, or 'the development of the social individual' as

such, presents itself now with the weight and incidence typical of the production that had as its precondition the mediation and unity of measurement. Intellect, the general human faculties (communicative interaction, abstraction, self-reflection) are now, in themselves, immediately – that is, without the mediation or incarnation into a thing – productive. They are no longer abstractions becoming real through an incarnation into things, products, meanings, objectives or common aims, but ‘ideals’ that are real in themselves without any such mediation. Rather than abstract and actual they are ideal and real: rather than real abstractions they are *ideal reals*. This means a radical reformulation of the constitution of value. Cooperation and mutual relations between people as such do not need any mediation in the use value of another commodity in order to have value and be productive. Value, in other words, needs no longer ‘deduction’ from the mediating conditions assumed abstractly as the element of unity of calculus. Its sense changes from deduction to *induction*, or from affect to value, as a line of its construction. This revaluation of value means that value is no longer commensurable, the time of its creation is no longer homogeneous, measurable and abstract labour time but time as real potentiality.

Modern capitalism is a historical society where the a-historical human ability to produce in general, the mere humanness of human beings, steps forward from behind an actual meaning, an actual product, an actual mode of production, an actual use, that is, *from behind history* to our immediate experience. For the first time the common mode of existence of human beings, the potential dimension of human existence as the *power to do anything* appears to us without the mediation of a meaning, product or common cause.²⁸ This is an event where the historicity of our experience, its relationship with doing something particular can be experienced historically, that is, as beginning and as deceasing, or in general as changing. Because of this we are able to see ourselves without the mediation of any particular action, meaning or use, as bare potentiality and capacity to do anything without the actualization into a particular action or community, without the need of turning into a Nation, a People or a Community. This is the same thing as to say that multitude enters production, a multitude of productive singularities, singularities whose productivity cannot be reduced to actual production, whose activity does not solidify into machinery or products but rather remains immanent in its performances.

As Deleuze points out, the question here is not of an adjective or an attribute. Multitude is not put together of many, it is not composed of individuals. It is rather an element in which something happens and which cannot be reduced to spatial distinctions. It cannot be reduced to one and it cannot be represented. It is absolutely missing any transcendent common denominator: it consists of countless subjects, boundless amount of ‘points’ of absolutely differentiated constellation. It concerns being together, being in common –

28 These forms of actualization (a meaning, product, mode of production, common cause) are exactly those through which the earlier historical periods have been able to be studied, yet we can't reach through them any longer to that what is essential for example in economy. The talk about the arbitrariness of the sign, object or a product is an expression of this lost of faith to an external referent or reason that would determine action. Those who wish to deny this arbitrariness and restore the rules that govern the relation between the meaning and reality wish to make us believe in the transcendence of meaning, to the un-historical nature of a mode of production – they wish us to deny our *experience*.

not the common as abstract labour, that ensemble of products and energies of labour accumulated, commodified and thus created by capitalism, the common of exploitation – but common (life of the mind) which is not actual in its mode of being.²⁹ In other words, multitude does not take place in space, through a particular common cause that could be communicated (it does not have a content or a particular task). It does not actualize in particular actions by which it can be determined what is productive and what is not. Yet it is real. It is ideal but not abstract, real but not actual, heterogeneous but continuous, undividable without changing a nature. This is how Deleuze defines the category of virtual which is multitude's mode of being, the tense form of production today. We must understand that "the foundation of productivity is no longer in the capitalistic investment but in the investment of the social brains. Or in other words: the maximal amount of freedom and the breaking of the disciplinary relations becomes the absolute foundation of creating wealth" (Negri, 1998: 139-140).

Mad Power

It seems to me that only a theory of multitude as the inescapable consequence of an attempt to rethink economy as general may explain the changes in the forms of organization and exercise of power we are confronting (like the permanently temporary war). I would therefore like to end in a remark on how the reconceptualization of economy as general leads also to a necessary rearticulation of its starting point, the very idea of biopolitics. I would like to stress here two points: in general economy (1) power no longer focuses on *life* in the same sense as in biopower; and (2) the exercise of power no longer acquires its function, reason or its justification from a particular institution or from a 'normal state' (it does not operate by the logic of the state of exception), as biopower always does.

To say that economy has become general is to say that multitude has entered production. It means that economy is able to become general only by disqualifying itself, by de-economizing itself, by abandoning its transcendent boundary in the idea of its confined sphere. To become general economy has to, in other words, give up itself and transgress its reason of value. I find it hard to think any other reason why economics for example has turned to terrains like conventions of exchange and of communicative relations and organization (institutions, rules, tacit knowledge, culture, intellectual and social capital, etc.), where the 'places of production' would now seem to reside. Economics has accepted the directly social nature of value or its 'immeasurability', the loss of coherence of any of its objective measure. But even if these 'places of production' cannot be measured, they can be organized and modulated. It is in this sense that the two hundred years of an odyssey of establishing economy as a distinct and self-contained sphere of reality is over and economy has again returned to

29 Here we find the limit of Marx: in Marx there isn't a conception of a productive common that is pre-capitalist. Abstract, accumulated, consolidated labour is never merely a quantity, an economic quantity, but an ensemble of relations, social relations that are relations of command and exploitation. The question here is of the importance of thinking a 'common' liberated from exploitation, a common that can no longer enter the relation of exploitation. See Negri and Virno (2003).

its roots as political economy in the original sense of the syntagma: economy understood as *general economy*, the general organization of life.

Yet, unlike biopower which formed man into a body that can be handled, managed and used in space (*discipline*) or which addressed a multiplicity of the man-species touched by illness, unemployment, the old age, rates of fertility and death (*biopolitics*), the new political economy does not any more concern the man-body or the man-species, the physical or biological life of a man or a population. The life at the centre of general economy is no longer the *organic bio-life* but rather the non-organic or *a-organic life*, the life without organs, where there are no external organs or vital functions by which it could be organized: the multiplicity of irreducible experiences cannot be organized in terms of individual bodies or as mere biological life of a population.

Whereas the disciplinary techniques dealt with the man-body in a closed space and biopolitics with the man-species in an open space and both tried to coordinate and organize time pre-eminently through space, the organizational problem in general economy centres no longer on the individual body but rather on the man in general, the general premises of being a human being, that is, on life that has become unfastened from the man-body and the man-species. This life is not the actual life in space but lifetime independent of any particular spaces or forms, the time due to which beings are not reducible to their corporeal manifestation in space or to their positions in the chronological continuum of time (to their spatial conditions). In other words, we are no longer dealing with *power over biolife* as in biopower, but rather with *power over life of the mind*, which does not so much create physical, spatial or biological boundaries (inscription of habits onto the body) but moods, sentiments and mentalities (inscription habits onto the mind). The organization of immaterial production is possible only through the management of the general conditions of human action and communication, through organizing the general conditions of organizing. This *organization of organization* does not operate at the level of actual action or plain intimidation but on that of anxiety and inadequacy; not by confinement or demanding obedience to the rules and being afraid of their violation, but by setting expectations, moods, opinion climates, standards of communication and cooperation. It is the only way to control and organize labour power as an immaterial power, that is, not at the level of actual acts or products but on the level of potentiality and possibilities of life.

This exercise of power over life of the mind might best be defined as *noo-political* (Lazzarato, 2004).³⁰ Deleuze gives us an important indication of how to define the change from *bio-politics* to *noo-politics* by saying that in disciplinary society what is isolated or confined is the 'outside' (Deleuze, 1988). Disciplinary techniques constrain any conduct or behaviour to the production of useful effects as long as the multiplicity is limited and the space is well defined. Biopolitical techniques govern life of any multiplicity when the multiplicity is numerous (the population as a whole) and the space open (the nation state defines the limits of the population). In both cases biopower is surely productive. Yet it is repressive not because it works upon a human nature already there, but because in both cases it isolates and confines the forces of change: it separates and neutralizes the potential forces of the outside. To confine the outside, to isolate the

30 The term is derived from the Greek *nous* meaning intelligence, intellect, mind.

virtual, means to neutralize its potential power (impotentiality) and to codify repetition to remove all power of variation – to reduce production to simple reproduction.

Maurizio Lazzarato (2004) has correctly pointed out that disciplinary society does not know change: its institutions organize by the temporality of chronological time. In disciplinary society the temporality of the event, the time due to which beings are not reducible to their manifestation in space (to their spatial conditions) is always the *exception*, the outside which must be confined and neutralized by rigorous procedures of organization. In other words, whereas disciplinary societies were societies of reproduction that, by isolating and confining the ‘outside’, managed inventions, ruptures of habits, rules or norms as exceptions, in general economy the crisis is no longer an exception but the permanent foundation of production which must now be continuously organized and modulated. Unlike the modern logic of the state of exception (see Agamben, 2003) which always needs an institutional context and a normal state within which to justify itself (even if as an exception), power over mind avoids committing itself to any particular institution, it cannot be withheld or slowed down by any of them. It rather seeks legitimization from the public opinion and ethically right: ethics and obscure ‘public opinion’ replace now formal law and its institutions as the basis of legitimacy (proven by the permanent war on terrorism). In other words, power over mind does not have any external ‘reason’ to refer to, no fixed point of reference or legitimization (like formal law, normal state, or a specific task of an institution). There is rather ‘no sense’, ‘no reason’ in it (its logic and points of reference seem to change from day to day). Indeed, power over mind is mad. It does not have any specific task or specific boundaries; it is uncontrolled by fixed reason; it is lacking in restraint. But it has its own rules. There is method in madness.³¹

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31 In Finnish, there is a specific word which maybe best combines both senses of the emerging power: *mielivalta*. It reads literally *mind-power* or *sense-power* – the meaning of the word *mieli* is etymologically in the German words der Sinn (sense), das Gemüt (mind), die Launen (mood), die Lust (desire), der Verstand (reason, understanding), die Ansicht (view, opinion), die Absicht (intent, mind), die Erinnerung (memory); and *valta* means power (in the sense of Macht, pouvoir, potestas) – but its first meaning is a use of power that is not based on ‘reason’ (law, rules, objective facts), that is *mindless* and *senseless*, that is *arbitrary* and *despotic*. *Mielivalta* is mad power over mind.

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