

Desiring Alienation in Capitalism. Zeal to De-alienate in Socialism

Keti Chukhrov

Abstract: One of the syndromes of the anti-capitalist critique of alienation, both in politics and aesthetics, has been a strange aberration that was inscribed in the post-structuralist analysis of capitalist society. Foucault's "History of Sexuality", Lyotard's "Libidinal Economy", Deleuze and Guattari's "Capitalism and Schizophrenia", Guattari's "Machinic Unconscious", Butler's "Psychic Life of Power" demonstrate this syndrome. In these cases what is criticized is simultaneously desired and accepted as the condition of vicious contemporaneity; so that repulsion to it overlaps with the fascination with it. The unconscious acceptance of vicious capitalist contemporaneity along with its fierce critique is inevitable in the conditions of impossibility of its sublation. Therefore the resisting strategy against alienation often resides in exaggerating and intensifying what is vicious. Consequently, radical tools of imagining or installing de-alienation are rejected as redemption. Such paradox is often manifested in the contempt to the philosophic and artistic contexts of historical socialism. Meanwhile, research of Soviet Marxists (Ilyenkov, Vygotsky, Leontiev) in psychology, philosophy and political economy reveals concrete cases of accomplished de-alienation and its continuity with the polit-economical achievements of October Revolution. The question then is whether we, the capitalist subjects, are able to share such onto-ethics.

Key-words: Alienation, De-alienation, Consciousness, Unconscious, Surplus, General, Language, Emancipation.

I. Aberrations of the Anti-capitalist Critique

Resisting alienation in the conditions of capitalist economy does not allow to sufficiently exert de-alienating agencies. On the contrary, such resistance rather intensifies or estranges the already existing traits of alienation. So that even Brecht's *Verfremdung* (Distanciation), or the Russian formalists' *ostranenie* (Defamiliarization) is rather a symptom of alienation, than a counteraction to it, in that it does not in any way undermine its logic. In fact, when mapping the logic of capital, Marx is not ontologizing the condition of surplus in it; for him the surplus value is mainly the disbalance between the forces of production and the relations of production. Conversely, in "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" (1972) by Deleuze and Guattari, "The Libidinal Economy" (1974) by Lyotard, "The History of Sexuality" (1976) by Foucault, or even "The Imaginary Institution of Society" (1975) by Castoriadis, surplus is, on the contrary, ontologized and seen as an innate force of the libidinal. In the afore-mentioned works alienation acquires an unsurmountable

ambivalence. Foucault wonderfully shows how the clinical control and inspection of sexual pathology generate sexuality. “Capitalism and Schizophrenia” epitomize the moebious condition when capital itself represents creative subversion that is both axiomatic/subjugating and liberating at the same time.¹ Desire in capitalism is generated by surplus economy, but it is this very desire that can be subversively applied against the limits, that hamper capitalism from creative and schizophrenic redundancies. Thus the post-capitalist condition is sought within capitalism’s productive resources and its semiology. But this anticapitalist radical creativity is not necessarily unalienated. On the contrary, it becomes even more uncanny and alien than the predictable modes of alienation. (Striving towards the inhuman, the machinic or the animalic mutations that we confront in the last 50-60 years, might be the consequence of such yearning for enhancing the already existing “regular” alienation). As Guattari states in his “Machinic Unconscious” (1979), if we devoid a human of existential status, as well as of living consciousness, then other energetic stratifications might acquire potentiality in life and production.

The premises of alienation and the paths of its sublation had been stated by Marx in his “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”; these premises being: division of labour, its abstract character, class division and private property. Marx’s discovery there was that the things that seem innate to human existence and social life – like trade, division of various capacities among the humans and the need in exchanging them - are not a natural state of things, but are conditioned by private property, so that division of capacities is not the motivation for exchange and trade, but rather the effect of exchange and trade conditioned by necessity to accumulate private property. Marx clearly posits eviction of private property as the main provision of overcoming alienation. Such an eviction could regain human condition and facilitate conflation of the cognitive and sensuous parameters: of thinking and the objective reality. Production, biased by private property, as Marx claims, produces the urgency of need.² Then man starts to function to man as arouser of an artificially constructed, necessitated novelties, as the encourager for a new enjoyment; whereas paradoxically - the growth of necessities generates the lack of necessities.³ (As we remember from Lyotard's

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1 Such logic is following the Althusserian disposition about the interpellated Subject, which is constructed as emancipated unit, simultaneously to its own being ideologically marked and subordinated.

2 Marx, 1988, p. 115-135.

3 Ibid.

“Libidinal Economy” this lack is crucial in constructing desire).

This early work of Marx does not give any prognosis of how the sublation of alienation could be implemented. However already there, much earlier than any works on desire and alienation would appear after 1960-s, Marx determines how private property and its economy of surplus estrange things and humans, and exactly by this token make things desired in urgent need. Marx emphasizes that “estrangement is manifested not only in the fact that my means of life belong to someone else, that my desire is the inaccessible possession of another, but also in the fact that everything is itself something different from itself – that my activity is something else and that, finally (and this applies also to the capitalist), all is under [the sway] of inhuman power”.⁴

In this argument the detachedness of objects of «my» labour from «me» makes their alienatedness and the labour that produces them dull and uninteresting. But the market, trade, exchange - exactly due to alienating detachment - turn those objects into a desired fetich. By this argumentation Marx already predicted craving for various modes of alienation (including transhuman horizons), caused by alienation itself.

However, for Marx the attraction of the desired fetiches is not attractive, mysterious or enigmatic; commodity is always estranged, but its bizarness is conditioned by surplus value economy. Even though the fetich might seem inhuman and mysteriously remote and longed for, its mystery is easily decodable in the logic of production. It is possible consequently to attain another state, - the one, when capitalism and its unhuman force of alienation might *not* be desired, even despite their attractivity.⁵

In this argumentation Marx is ethically and epistemologically quite remote from what we witness in most important works on alienation and desire, appearing in 1970-s: Castoriadis’ “The Imaginary Society and its Institution”, Lyotard’s «Libidinal Economy”, Guattari’s “The Machinic Unconscious”, and Deleuze/Guattari’s “Capitalism and Schizophrenia”. Here desire is constitutive for capitalist production and its surplus economy, in that it produces phantasms of fetiches, while it is at the same biased by deferral and lack, never saturating this phantasmatic greed. However, according to Lyotard, it is this very viciousness, this very pathological (alienating) undercurrent of desire that is desired, and not merely the illusionary fetiches contrived by it. Therefore, resisting capitalism for Lyotard is only plausible within the double-bind logic of Moebius band – when alienation can be surpassed only with

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4 Ibid., p.124.

5 Ibid., p. 121.

even greater alienation. This is how we get aberration of mistaking aestheticized alienation for emancipation, or of regarding extrapolated libidinality directed against dispositiv and order as revolutionary force.

For Lyotard representation, law, state, authority confront the subversiveness of pulsion and libidinality; but he goes as far as to say that even the law, representation, “great Zero”, “despotic rule” are as well libidinally biased and inscribed into the economy of desire. Thereby, power, its restrictiveness and even religion in its asceticism are libidinal, whereas desire in its own turn always faces the danger of turning into a dispositiv. ⁶ Exteriority and interiority are fused in the Moebius logic, which implies that, while libidinality might be inscribed in most despotic aspirations, it might as well subvert from despotism too.

It means that it is not that evil and viciousness are chosen as the protest against capital's domination (as in classical modernism), but the choice itself is to be deferred to make such moduses as pain, tragedy or virtue inviable. Aberration is there, not when viciousness is superceding virtue, as long as virtue is simply denounced as false (for example, when one has to claim that «truth» is despotic, etc). But aberration takes place when even what is considered to be ‘common good’ happens to be contaminated by the traits of the libidinal desire and vicious genealogy. I.e. libidinality of desire can manifest itself elsewhere, even in something that is impossible to be desired, or is not accessed as something desirable. Thus the non-libidinal phenomena – religion, tradition, representation, virtue – are as well libidinal, are as well the products and embodiments of alienation. Thereby, even what might have been de-alienated – by means of approximation to un-alienatedness of virtue, of the common good - in fact merely remains to be a libidinal capitalist phantasy, hence happens to be alienation too. Then what could have been a project of de-alienation is not able to exceed alienation.

The outcome of this condition is that what has to be achieved as social virtue can only be a false virtue, disguised into it, but functioning as the repression of the Signifier. On the other hand, what seems to be alienated, perverse, uncanny, might not be that vicious if one adds artistic intensity to it, and surpasses by means of greater perversity and estrangement.

So, the radical critique of capitalism since 1970-s gives paradoxical examples of aspiring to those features as counter-capitalist that had been in fact only intensifying the alienating conditions of capitalism.

One of the most structured and logical manifestation for such

6 Lyotard, 2005, p. 5-6.

stance is “The Machinic Unconscious” by Guattari. In his critique of dominant semiology and its axiomatics Guattari becomes the proponent of the a-sygnifying flights from the rule of the Signifier. ⁷

His logic is the following: capitalism resides in the force of abstraction, but what can subvert this regular abstraction is an even more enhanced, creatively produced and asignifying abstraction. Instead of dealing with such non-capitalist urgencies as the eviction of private property, overall equal education, blurring the borders between the privileged and unprivileged labour, the flight from capitalism might be sought in deviations from what functions as the universal, the language, the system, the power, etc. After claiming capitalism as insufficient creativeness, Guattari calls for asygnifying creativity of the primitive societies, indigeneous communities, of magic, of dangerous animalities, of deviant facialities and de-territorializing moves. He juxtaposes diagrams to Gestalt and Umwelt, assemblages to distinct semiotic essences, labyrinth to platonic exit from the cave, redundancy to reduction, dissociation to composition, de-subjectivized non-genital libido to the familiarly biased genital one, infantile mumbling and its metabolism to the adult normality, event as occurrence to substances, etc.

The problem in such apologia of redundancy and a-sygnification is in that the modes representing the system – the law, the truth, the universal, the language, are identified with capitalism completely and criticized as the features of capitalism. (This remark is at stake in Althusser’s argument too, when he identifies the ruling class, the capitalist class and the law).⁸ Meanwhile, the above-mentioned categories are not necessarily embodying something exclusively capitalist. Moreover, theoretically, in case of the defeated capitalism they might as well represent and guarantee the temporary dictatorship for the subjugated class (proletariat). In this case the law and organization would, on the contrary, function as the de-alienating force. As a result, the deviation, which in fact causes further alienation of the already existing alienating syntagmatics of the capitalism’s semio-system is entitled to operate as the only remedy against that system. Moreover, the conditions that might unify and hence potentially socialize and de-alienate (these conditions being the General, the common good and its social accessibility) are denounced and claimed to have no less alienating character, than all other features of capitalism. In fact the fear of de-alienating social procedures arises from the fear of

7 Guattari, 2011.

8 Althusser, 2014.

coercive equality. It is true that October Revolution didn't guarantee de-alienation in full range; it had to be a long-term social practice that was never completed in the Soviet republics. However, what was facilitated by October Revolution and what retained viability in its aftermath even notwithstanding Stalinism, was *criminalisation* of all those provisions that are listed by Marx as alienating: private property, surplus economy, ethics and aesthetics of desire and libidinality, fetich of consumption. This simply meant an abrupt, overall and hence coercive *criminalisation* of alienation on all levels – social, economic, cultural. Therefore communism would not be «a collective management of alienation» (as S. Tomsic put it);⁹ this model already functioned as social democracy within capitalism. But the achievement of socialist revolution was exactly in the urgent criminalization of the otherwise «normal» components of capitalist political economy, - in the abrupt and even coercive instituting of only those modes of production that are de-alienating.

As we see from the arguments of Guattari, it is not alienation that causes concern when demanding deviating from axiomatics of capitalist systems, but on the contrary, what causes concern are the “normalizing” and the non-alienating functions of the law, of the common good, of organisation. In other words, in fact, what causes irritation with the order and law is the capacity that would allow the law to restrict alienation, i.e. to de-alienate. This is because such redemptive de-alienation could only take place either on behalf of ruling class, or on behalf of external power – like God, State, Religion, Ideal, etc. Thereby, it would be a false de-alienation and would de facto exert alienation on behalf of a system merely pretending to de-alienate, but by this token alienating even more. (Religion is the classical case of such alienation, pretending to be de-alienation). Then, deviation is fighting the system not because it is a vicious capitalist system, but it is de-facto fighting what might as well be the de-alienating aspect of organization (and order) in the system. Thus the deviant moves, when resisting alienation, operate as the possibility to additionally and excessively alienate. The surplus value – this embodiment of abstracted labour and alienation – can then inflate to extreme and acquire creative potentiality. For Guattari surplus value becomes a redundancy, pregnant with new productive contingencies, capable of undermining the code. It generally becomes the force of surpassing the code and order, without which creativity is impossible. For example the transterritorial mode of rhizome ecology and its deviated reproduction is explained as the

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 9 This statement was made by Samo Tomsic as an argument to the present paper at the Historical Materialism conference in AUB, Beirut, on March 10, 2017, at the panel moderated by Ray Brassier.

surplus value of code, in which surplus value acquires the force of the asygnifying shift, of the excess from code. Surplus value rejuvenates the rules of evolution and genetics, allowing biological territorialities to become social assemblage redundancies and flights.¹⁰

If Marx was attempting to bring abstraction to the matter, to the concreteness, in order to marry it with the sensuous dimension, here we see, on the contrary, intensification of abstraction; the normative abstraction of the code should become abstract anxiety without the object. The same goes for dissociations (disseminations), which make capitalism creative, so that they should be enhanced further to surpass capitalism's systematic regularities. Let's remember the way Deleuze treats the cave - instead of exiting it, one turns it into the endless labyrinth, where there is no division between light and dark and which one can never leave. In the beginning of the “Libidinal Economy” Lyotard refers to Plato's cave in a similar way: in this case those actors who would show the objects to the tied captives observing the shadows of those objects on the wall, turn out to be the shadows themselves and not actors at all. The cave then becomes the counter-universalist and nomadic totality.¹¹

Another eloquent example of aberration and confusion in the search for the paths of emancipation is the argumentation of Cornelius Castoriadis in his “The Imaginary Institution of Society”. His standpoint is floating between orthodox Marxism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. Castoriadis declines a number of principal premises of Marx, but cannot fully accept the radical post-structuralist tactics of treating capitalism either. When it comes to Marx's exigency for radical reconstruction of social terrain, to the necessity to eradicate the conditions generating alienation, Castoriadis labels Marx's political economy as ideology, as extremist rationality, crypto-bureaucratic sociology. But when it comes to overtly soar into the inhuman condition of overacting alienation á la Guattari, then Castoriadis pulls back and searches for classical social democratic remedies against alienation, such as: participatory autonomy, individual autonomous consciousness, etc.

Critique of Marx by Castoriadis is a good example of how the unconscious desire of a capitalist Subject functions in evading communism. The main thing is to clearly posit (quite similarly to

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 10 Guattari, 2011, p. 120-122.

11 Lyotard, 2005, p. 12.

post-structuralism) that alienation is generated not merely by labour division and deprivation (i.e. not by economy and production), but it is residing deeper in the social Unconscious which speaks on behalf of the Imaginary. Capitalism's phantasmatic nature, as Castoriadis insists, epitomizes the condition of the Imaginary, which in its own turn is the site of the unsurmountable power of the Unconscious. But then, quite unlike the post-structuralists, having acknowledged the alienating power of the imaginary and of the Unconscious, having emphasized the power of the alien and the phantasmatic Otherness, he demands the agency of Subject's autonomous *consciousness* and the *conscious* decision-making as the counteraction to the rule of the unconscious phantasm. It is here that we confront a confusion: capitalism can be overcome by certain components of capitalism itself, that evade alienation, since capitalism contains agencies that are beyond and counter to alienation. Among such agencies Castoriadis names autonomy of a conscious Subject and his/her de-alienating potentiality, that can turn the phantasmatic otherness into intersubjectivity, into 'con-substantiality' of autonomous individuals. By participating together in social life these individuals could help to conflate the agency of institutions with the agency of societal texture. Such civil agency would deprive the institutes of their sovereignty in favor of society. It would de-alienate the otherwise negative social context in which everything – the market, the systems, the institutes – alienate, turning social texture into hostile and alienated otherness.

Yet, when the question arises about overall, revolutionary methods of eradicating alienation – eradicating that very phantasmatic Imaginary that speaks on behalf of the Unconscious, or those very drives that blur the utter reality by fictitious desires – then such eradication is stated by Castoriadis as forceful, violent and leading to extreme rationalization and bureaucracy. In the end it is exactly the unsurmountable force of the Imaginary (i.e. precisely the alienation and its contingency) that becomes an irresistible enchanting force that maintains capitalism – because its enchantment is stronger than any justice of equality and of non-alienation (labelled as over-rationalized bureaucracy). According to such logic, even if it is important to develop the agencies of de-alienation in the midst of capitalist alienation, alienation will always prevail.

Castoriadis is intimidated by communism's social structure in which the societal condition of the general, of the overallly collective surpasses the intersubjective civil continuity of institutes. An overt de-alienation would presuppose, as he claims, a violently contrived and artificial vision of being, it would construct only the fiction of common

good on behalf of the self-declared Subject claiming to be the master of history.¹²

By such argument Castoriadis dismisses Marx's argument from "Economic and Philosophic manuscripts of 1844" according to which the attractivity of phantasm and hence of commodity can be easily unwinded and disenchanting by abolishing surplus value economy. For Castoriadis the political economy and labour stop to be the main realm where the conditions of alienation and class division might be terminated and sublated. This is because alienation operates libidinally, i.e., on a much 'deeper level' than any political economy - closer to body, skin, drives and the unconscious yearnings.¹³

The cause of alienation in this case does not derive from economic deprivation ending in deprivation of a worker of his humanness, as Marx would posit it. The cause of alienation in that case is not in the artificially generated poverty caused by distilling surplus value of everything. But alienation, as well as the libidinal undercurrent of capital, reside in the Unconscious, and hence in the innateness of the phantasms of the Imaginary. Then the Imaginary and the Unconscious are the sources of both – of alienation and of creativity.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the political and ethical standpoint of Marx resides in the premise that economic conditions motivate biopolitics, that they are antecedent to the bond of political economy with the Unconscious and the phantasm, which for Castoriadis, as well as for post-structuralists are considered prior to economic and social alienation. Moreover, according to Castoriadis, Marx's economic determinism didn't allow him to predict that capitalism has the capacity to surpass incoherence between the productive forces and relations of production. So that in the end, as he claims, productive forces evolved without allowing the relations of production collapse, quite contrary to Marx's predictions. This is the reason why the social systems and public relations (relations of production) sustain even when they are lagging behind the development of the productive forces.¹⁵

We see in this logic that the force that saves from the over-rationalization, from over-functionality of communism and from radical Marxist critique of political economy is exactly the Imaginary – the remainder that makes such things as, for example, the three thousand

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12 Castoriadis, 1987, p.110-115.

13 Ibid., p. 132-135.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 42-45.

years of Christianity, the child's infantile mumbling, the shaman's sorcery, the power of mysterious magic and other inexplicable powers – sustain in human history. In other words, judging by Castoriadis' argumentation, the Imaginary is the force of alienation and it embodies capitalism; but it is too powerful, creative, multifarious to be surpassed by any equality condition or any radical revolutionary transformation of economy and production. Then what epitomizes capitalist alienation simultaneously contains the power to diversify it, make creative, subversive and fascinating. Such stance of Castoriadis fits the disposition of all post-structuralist laudations of alienation as of an inhuman condition that can be enhanced and radicalized. Yet, Castoriadis is not daring to make a further step towards accepting the "evil" of capitalism, its eternal "labyrinth" as Deleuze does; as well as he is not able to refer to revolutionary social lexicons; since it suffices for him to confine himself to reconsidering institutions – to retranslate them from the alienated and foreign language of the Imaginary into the language of conscious decision of intersubjectively allied autonomous citizens.

Hence the aberration – exactly what is claimed as the vice to be evicted becomes the ambivalent omnipresent power and the mysterious "otherness" of the vice. But it can not be surmounted and maybe should not be surmounted, because its vicious traits (magic, alienation, surplus) might be too precious for humanity.¹⁶

II. Alienating Power of the Universals: Language, Law, Virtue.

I will now once more reconstruct the logic of aberrations in counter-capitalist critique in the conditions of capitalism in a crude form, in order to reveal the way it operates. Capitalism is understood as the suppressive social order, as long as it is a capitalist order, so that order is «wrong» as long as it is a capitalist order. However, the «wrongness» of the capitalist order is confused with the «wrongness» of order as such. In this case, not merely capitalist order, but any order stands for power, totality, subjection, universality, control, and embodies "the wrongness" of capital. Consequently, there follows a confusion: the centrifugal elements of capital (even though they are part and parcel of capital's logic) are seen through the prism of counter-capitalist emancipation, whereas the traits of any order as such, - which might not necessarily represent a capitalist order, - stand for capitalist

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16 Ibid., p. 110-113.

subjugation and its ruling modes. The schizoprenic components of capital are then treated as flights from the law and order, which are claimed to represent capital, although they might as well bear the potentiality to rather surpass capital in case they organize power and law in favor of the exploited. Thus, law becomes "wrong" by definition, and the forces to oppose it are then searched in capital itself, since it remains unheeded that law is detested not as the trait of capital, but as the trait restraining libidinality of desire and enjoyment. Yet, it remains ignored that the resistant forces subverting the law, rather represent and enhance the capital's alienating potentiality, than undermine it.

Thus, the means that are sought to evade the law are pertaining to capitalist anthropology and its imaginaries. This happens despite the fact that the primary goal of critique was not merely suppressiveness of *any* social order but the suppressiveness of *capitalist* social order. The universal, the law and the common virtue – are then treated as the initial falsities, «the big Zero», the Big Other. And all divergences subverting them, - even though these might be embodiments of capitalist conditions themselves, - become the vicious (anti-virtuous), but the inevitable resisting tools against false virtue of an order. As a result, capital's lexicons which were to be resisted, mistakenly acquire the status of "revolutionary" deviation, become the lexicons of liberation and freedom. Whereas 'the order' that could have been virtuous if it had not been the order of an unjust society, proclaims any virtue as authority and subjugation, since virtue can only falsely pretend to be virtuous, no matter what it stands for. Then the fact that the virtue, the common good, the universality might be repressive because of their tie to capitalist order of an unjust society - and not by themselves - remains unattended. And consequently, those things that are generated as exactly capitalist violations of the possible commonness and universality, - of the possible common virtue, - become the resistance to the fakeness of virtue and are related to it as to suppression and bureaucracy.

What remains unheeded in this case is that the social order could have as well been the "order" of communism, it could have been applied to construct the concrete premises in organizing de-alienation. However, interestingly, in the conditions of post-fordist capitalist sociality, as soon as one confronts the premises of radical communism one immediately identifies them with the suppressing power, disciplinary society, whereas the subversive freedoms being part and parcel of capitalist production acquire the modus of utter resistance against the power of capitalism or any power whatsoever. This is because the order, being capitalist order preserves both the

“wrongness” of being an order and the wrongness of being capitalist, whereas other components of capitalism that manifest themselves as counter-order, - such as consumption, surplus, libidinality, desire, subversivity, - operate within capitalism as potentially counter-capitalist traits.

As it is known in post-structuralist thought the language – as a conventional structure is seen as representation of authority, rather than the vehicle of *social generality*. Why? Because in capitalism the primary view of any societal structure, including language, is negative. What is given as the social condition preliminary to the “I” is apriori imposed by power and authority. Therefore the subject of an artistic or political agency has to dissociate and subvert anything that could have been diachronically or synchronically prescribed to an individual (language being one of such prescriptions). Pathology is an inevitable component of such society since it needs the realm *beyond* the structure or organization to maintain the subverted but still tamed «beyond». So that, instead of regarding pathology as normality, pathology is cherished to be included into the system as the counteracting divergent “beyond” within the system. Consolidation with other individuals is then possible mainly *against* some suppressing power, whereas the “other” to consolidate with - be it suppressor or the subaltern - remains alien. The negative is placed in 'the other', it is rarely sought in one's own self, in the “I” – the condition that makes such disposition non-dialectical, devoid of self-critique. Such hybridized individuals consolidate mainly against certain the Big Other - against authority, power, subjection, law, order, discipline, etc. They connect in order to direct themselves against some external negative force, rather than in favor of constituting the unified “each other”. As Boris Groys remarks, in this negativist logic (which is rather a nihilism, than Hegelian negativity), there is little room for productive politics. This leads to the politicization mainly of “the negative”, whereas the politicization of the common good simply disappears. The active side in this case is not a politically motivated subject, but some external demonic force that always subjugates. Hence one has to resist it with harsher demonism, or tame and moderate it (as Castoriadis claims) with civil agencies. The virtue causes shame, but demonism, nihilism does not.¹⁷ Then, the principal element of struggle is in resisting rather than constructing. In this confinement of social construction to the poetics of endless resistance little is left for self-

17 Groys, 2016, <http://www.colta.ru/articles/raznoglasiya/11644>

critique, or for constructive work on the de-alienation of the “other”.

III. Communist Duty to De-alienate.

But what if the primary condition of existence is the mutation itself: the dissociation, the blur, the imprecision, the inarticulation, the mumbling, the insufficiently human, the ever childish, that had already diverted from light and clarity and keeps one in eternal obscurity of the “cave”, when detachment and alienation from “the world” are absolute. In 1963 the Soviet psychologists Alexander Mesheriakov and Ivan Sokoljanski founded the Zagorsk internat for deaf, blind and dumb children. They relied on psychological school of Alexey Leontiev who was the disciple of Lev Vigotsky and were supported theoretically by the Marxist philosopher Evald Ilyenkov. Mesheriakov and Sokoljanski developed a special tactile signal system of dactilologia, which was a developed extension of tiphlosurdopedagogics. As Ilyenkov wrote in his text “Where does the Mind Come From” (1977), without pedagogical dedication these children would remain in the world where there is only matter, but not mind, spirit, psychics, consciousness, volition, thinking, speech, where there is no image and idea of an outer world.”¹⁸

The goal of the founders of the school was not merely to develop the sustainability for invalids, equipping them with minimal linguistic capacities via special system of signification, but to prove that pedagogy in the social context of communism is able to construct a full-fledged social Subject with social consciousness even despite the lowest physiological and sensory capacities remaining between the vegetative and animal condition (i.e. even lower than the psychics of an animal). This had to be an experiment of observing and detecting of how consciousness and thinking generate; how speech, language and the capacity to connect material things (activity) and the concepts and their linguistic forms is born.

The initial psychophysical and social condition in this case was the abnormality, the pathology, permanent instability and deviation. Yet the goal of pedagogics in this case was not to construct the survival or clinical protection of such divergence, but to prove that even out of this total psychosomatic inability a full-fledged member of the human society can emerge. In this case it is exactly the de-alienated social and cultural surrounding that can become either the medium of radical emancipation, or, on the contrary, doom such creatures to total or semi-animalic alienated existence. Such pedagogical undertaking might

18 Ilyenkov, 1991, p.30-43.

have been viable only in the conditions of the de-alienated relations of socialist production to guarantee the inclusion of the bio-physically deviant children into the society of equality. What is important in this inclusion is that the psychic and linguistic deviations are undergoing explicit de-pathologizing, since in this case it is de-pathologizing of the initial pathology and its de-alienation that happens to be emancipatory.

But let us now imagine that these “creatures” attain minimal level of consciousness and comprehension due to someone's personal treatment, remaining otherwise outcasts for the rest of the society. And if anyone takes care of them, these are private or familial undertakings of concrete individuals who can afford it, or a civil work of compassion, pity and charity, condescendingly assisting them to survive. In such conditions the resisting poetics on behalf of an individual alienated to this extreme could be imagined as a macabre kafkian animalization, monstrous zombie grimace, revenging for exclusion. That would be a predictable logic of resistance in the alienated society, when 'the other' cannot be inscribed in the ethics and poetics of de-alienatedness. In capitalist conditions the civil solidarity with the “other” mainly implies taking into account each other's particularities and singular individual traits. Yet 'the other' cannot be de-alienated merely by studying and integrating the particularities of existence of a concrete identity or a community. De-alienation can take place only as a radical decision to construct the common grounds that would abolish the watershed between the self and the other, the owned and the not owned.

It should be noted that for Vygotsky, as well as for Ilyenkov, language is rather the tool of generalization, than a system of signification that suppresses body, affects, etc. The capacity of language to make things conscious facilitates generality, and hence the commons. But such generality is not an act of alienating or abstracting. A word accomplishes the function of generality in that it is used in accord with “the others”. A «word» is not merely a signifier, it is not reduced to the signifying form and meaning. It is an operation that already implies that it comes together with the notion (Vygotsky). And notion is something that is a generalized imprint of external, objective reality and labour activity. This means that language is not the tool of abstaining or alienating from reality and material life. Then the ineffable, the unsaid is not mystified and substantialized as something irrational — but it is just something un-realized, non-conscious, something that had not yet reached consciousness. The process of generalizing via concepts does not impoverish the reality and materiality or detach from it; on the contrary, it brings reality closer, since it posits it generally

and objectively.¹⁹ Even the internalized inner speech and production of thought are then the outcome of socialization. Thereby the inner speech is not the Unconscious, or something innate and individual. On the contrary, it is the means of generalization the reality. When the inner speech is refracted in a person it remains to be no less general than the external reality. This is what makes Vygotsky's treatment of the language different from one of structuralism and post-structuralism. To repeat again, it is important that for Vygotsky the word does not come without notion; moreover, first comes the notion, and the word then realizes, finishes the general dimension of sense. (As Vygotsky incessantly repeats, «The word is ready, when the concept is ready», not the other way round). Yet, the thought is not so much expressed by a word (language), but rather accomplished and facilitated in it. This leads to important conclusions: not only thought is not different from external material reality ontogenetically, but the word in its own turn is not separate from thought and hence from objective reality either. This stance enables Vygotsky to assert the anti-cartesian dialectical entity of being, thought and language (speech).

Such disposition is compared by Ilyenkov to the actions of an artist making a portrait. The artist has a model (a person) in front of himself and a canvas (screen). The object to be depicted and the tableau with the object depicted are the two phenomena extrinsic to the artist. The language as Ilyenkov claims plays the same role as the artist: by means of language one transposes the individual empirical data on the “screen” of the social consciousness. It is this generalizing role of language that saves us from the collapse into the type of contact with the outer reality that would be conditioned by mere non-conscious behavior reflexes.²⁰ According to Vygotsky the language as thought transmits the automatic components of the Unconscious into the consciousness of intentions and decisions. Therefore the pedagogics, learning (culture) is always ahead of psychics. The notions (which are the tools of generalization) are connected not as associations, and not according to the structures of the perceived images, but as the outcomes of relations of activity and commonness.

It is the other way round in post-structuralism. In it language is the immaterial, incorporeal, and a systematized abstraction. It rather hampers the flows of thinking and creative affectivity. Hence the search

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¹⁹ Vygotsky, 1934, p.16-76. (In Eng. Trans. by Alex Kozulin, 1986, p.12-58).

²⁰ Ilyenkov, 1960.

for subversiveness, evading the language and becoming bodily affective, reconsidering gendered body, or dissociating the linguistic order into counter linguistic, counter-semiotic performative materialities. Within such logic body and action, its hubris is confronted to the existing language with its cultural codes. Language is treated as the bureaucratized constancy that has the impact of the conventionalized and disciplinary alienating medium, detaching from matter, from body, from the Real, representing truth only falsely. Hence any artistic or creative gesture has to estrange the language, alienate it further or mutate to get access to things and senses *beyond* it.

In the pedagogical methodology for deaf, dumb and blind the strategy was converse. Most crucial point was in fact a materialist premise, according to which both speech and language are not at all an abstraction detached from body, senses, gestures and activity. On the other hand, body and senses and their materiality is not something nominalistically material in terms of being separate from capacity for concept production. Language is merely the reflection and hence extension of activity and labour forms in their interaction with the material world. Thus consciousness is generated by activity. As Alexey Leontiev writes in his "Activity and Consiousness",

«Thus, meanings refract the world in man's consciousness. The vehicle of meaning is language, but language is not the demiurge of meaning. Concealed behind linguistic meanings (values) are socially evolved modes of action (operations), in the process of which people change and cognise objective reality. In other words, meanings are the linguistically transmuted and materialised ideal form of the existence of the objective world, its properties, connections and relations revealed by aggregate social practice...»²¹

As Leontyev argues meanings are merely forms, abstracted (Idealized) from living, activity and labour, but these meanings even despite becoming part of individual consciousness nevertheless continue to imply the means, objective conditions and results of actions "regardless of the subjective motivation of the people's activity in which they are formed [...]. At the early stages, when people participating in collective labour still have common motives, meanings as phenomena of social consciousness and as phenomena of individual consciousness directly correspond to one another. But this relationship disintegrates along with the emergence of the social division of labour and of private property».²²

21 Leontyev, 2009, p. 126.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/leontev/works/activity-consciousness.pdf>

22 Ibid., 126-129.

Ilyenkov's standpoint was similar to this position of Leontiev in that there is little difference between thinking, language and practical activity. Thinking is not in passively perceiving and reproducing the concepts while they are detached from activity, societal surrounding and labour, but thinking begins when the child starts to «move things» by means of notions (and notions can only be linguistically articulated). In other words, thinking is possible when the child experiences translating the actions into notion. Only after such stage one can truly and consciously operate with concepts. Language (along with thought) then merely conceptualizes (endows with the ideal form) the material and objective activities, including labour.

Experimental tiphlosurdopedagogics, (founded by Leontiev, Mesheriakov and Sokolyanski) confirmed that language is not an alienating abstraction but is a cognitive application of activity and of body and sensory experience. Ilyenkov, as well as Leontiev insisted that thinking is acquired via the extension and translation of applied tools of activity and labour. If a normal person hears and memorizes words and combines them with the optical experience, the deaf and blind cannot perceive language by unmediated sensory means. For them the meaning becomes translatable only via tactile contact with objects and by means of body acts. The principal metaphor of culture and language for Ilyenkov therefore became a *spoon* as a cultural achievement of humanity, since it was used as a tool of a primary activity for the deaf and blind children. According to Ilyenkov, the access to the realm of the social culture can be acquired by the child by means of merely a spoon: by learning to use the spoon the child already gets access to the world of human thinking, the realm of language and even the world culture. As soon as the deaf and blind child is able to use the spoon her actions are not any more directed merely by biology, by the brain's morphology, but by the form and disposition of objects, made by humans, by outer world and acting in it. Only then the acquisition of speech becomes possible.²³ Experimental tiphlosurdopedagogics became thus the exemplary case of how the world, the general, the language, the social wealth demonstrate their de-alienatedness for those who are born into extreme alienation.

The method of American psychologists with deaf and blind described by William James as the case of Helen Keller was opposite.²⁴ In it the primary stage of successful edification was in mastering the

23 Ilyenkov, 1991, p.30-43.

24 Cited from Leontyev, 2009.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/leontev/works/activity-consciousness.pdf>

speech, the words and only afterwards the transition from repeating the words to subsequent perception of the words via combining them with certain sensory experiences. For example, Helen Keller first learned, repeated and memorized the word “water” and only afterwards understood that the word “water” learnt by her from the teacher signifies the liquid felt in her hands. The signifier “water” then remained an abstract and detached correlation to certain sensory experience, rather than a conceptual reflection and transimission of certain objective activity. In this case the abstract word-form and its emission precede the activity, that generated the word as concept. Consequently, consciousness as a mental and cognitive practice keeps separate from the sensory, practical and sensuous practice. Consiousness remains internal, whereas sensuous contact with the world is external.

The Soviet psychology thus discovers and reveals a very important condition of social consciousness. Idealization, organization, dematerialization, generalization, universality, culture, language, might not at all imply an abstraction, or a negative subordinating condition, the order of dispositive and apparati. They are able not to alienate; on the contrary, they emancipate from obscurity and serve as the unmediated and un-alienated access to the commons; of course, given that the common good already rules the society.

Thus the child with damaged senses, devoid of the world, confined merely to body and brain morphology and doomed for darkness and silence, the creature could develop the mind, despite the fact that the development of mind is impossible with the collapse of senses. But it was the collective, the pedagogical effort, activity and concreteness of labour that turned the utmost doom of estrangement and alienation into the de-alienated condition of the commons.

In his article “Where does the Mind Come from” Ilyenkov mentions how Alexander Suvorov (the pupil of the internat for the blind and deaf, who graduated from Moscow University and defended his PhD in psychology in 1994) was holding a speech before students and was asked a question. The question sounded thus: “Your case contradicts the old premise of materialism according to which all that gets into mind is necessarily developed and provided by senses. If your senses are damaged how could your mind develop. How can you understand things even better than us, if you do not hear or see?”

The question was transmitted to Alexander Suvorov via dactile alphabet. And he pronounced into microphone: “Why do you think that we do not hear and see? We see and hear by the eyes of all our friends, all people, all humankind”.²⁵

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25 Ibid. p.43

This case - when extreme perceptive pathology finds its un-alienated access to the Universal - cannot be exemplary for the societies of historical socialism as a whole, since it never achieved any overall de-alienation.

However, we see from this example that in the conditions of the use-value economy the dimension of the general (of the materiality of the ideal) is not in abstracted mediation, or in alienated metaphysics, but it evolves as the consequence to non-surplus economy and eradicated private property and can be concomitant to body/matter as its immediate access to the common good and its acquisition, even despite the most limited sensory capacities of a human being.

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