

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



A Critique of Capitalism and other Established Systems

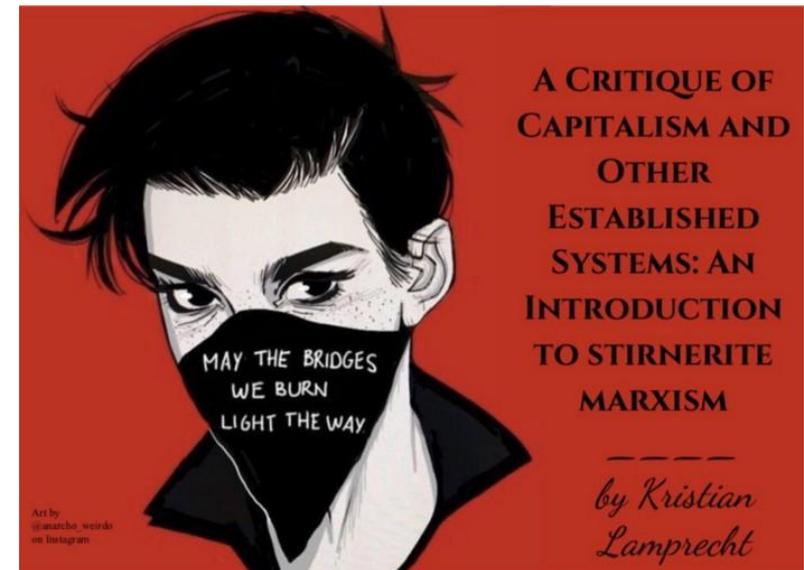
An Introduction to Stirnerite Marxism

Kristian Lamprecht

Kristian Lamprecht
A Critique of Capitalism and other Established Systems
An Introduction to Stirnerite Marxism
2019

Retrieved on 2020-12-26 from
<https://medium.com/@IdahoSocialist/a-critique-of-capitalism-an>

usa.anarchistlibraries.net



2019

Contents

Introduction	5
1. On Marxism	5
2. On Theory (and Ghosts)	10
Egoist-Communism	13
Anti-Workerism	13
Commodity Production	14
Workerism in Marxism	15
On Moralism and Ideology	17
Development of Ideology	17
The Spectacle (-Commodity Society)	19
The Commodity	21
Moralism and its Consequences	25
A Brief Critique of Moral Arguments	25
Against the Religion of Moralism	25
An Elaboration on Stirnerism	30
Who was Stirner?	30
Onto his Philosophy	30
Defining Stirnerite Marxism	32

Addendum	34
Sexual Egoism: A Critique of Labels	36
Section One: On the Self	36
Section Two: On Micro-Labels	37
Section Three: On General Labels	39
Section Four: On Freedom and Practical Determination . .	39

would only serve to sow division and harm those who find solidarity and satisfaction in labels. Who are we to tell a gay man not to identify as such? Even with the most sound reasoning and logic we may not achieve this. Instead, I propose a different but still radical solution: reclamation. Those who despise labels should reject them, casting aside these categories and promptly freeing themselves from social reduction. We should embrace those who take this path. But for others, we should not force this, It would do far more harm and perhaps prevent us from achieving the ultimate goal. As egoist theorist Kaspar (also known as ‘Glitchy Egoist’) wrote in her fantastic article “Gender Egoism: On Ownness and Identity”:

“We can take up gender as our property, rather than hold the very concept of gender as something sacred. We can make the case for anti-humanism, and we can go beyond humanism to our uniqueness. Or we can reject the concept of gender if it has no use for us individually.”

What she is referring to here is a common concept in Stirnerite egoism: the concept of taking or reclaiming things as our property; in Stirner’s view, property comes into ownership of the individual through conscious realization of its inherent fluidity (that is, its state as a material thing that has no inherent rights of property and ownership), and physical and mental force maintained over it. When it comes to gender, and as an extension sexuality, we can claim it as a sort of ‘property’, using it or rejecting it as we see fit. What she misses in the article is the inevitability of the collapse of these concepts once they are freed and used in such a way. Labels and roles require an anchor, a relation to which they are tied to maintain their existence. Through this egoism, we create the conditions for our own emancipation. We create a path towards the withering away of labels. Towards liberation and the fulfillment of our unique. Forward! Always forward!

Introduction

A brief note: in this book, “working class” and “proletariat” are used interchangeably.

“Communism for us is not a state of affairs to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement, which seeks to abolish the present state of things.” (Karl Marx, “The German Ideology” [1846])

1. On Marxism

For the uninitiated, it is crucial that I provide a basic sketch of Marxism. Anyone who considers themselves an expert on the subject should feel free to skip this section. In the most basic terms, Marxism is an analysis of society: past and present. It is a combination of economic theory, materialist philosophy, and historical analysis. It was developed by Marx using rigorous social-scientific principles and relentless dedication to detail and depth (often to the chagrin of the readers, it must be said). The tool of analysis Marx used is called the dialectic (dialectical method of analysis, in its full name). In dialectical analysis, the analyst sees progress as the conflict and eventual resolution (or destruction) of two subjects. This was originally taken from the Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel is the one of the most prominent thinkers in the philosophical school of **idealism**: the conception of the world as a reflection of human thoughts, or as Hegel termed it, the ‘ideal’. He strove for

a synthesis of ideas towards the perfect knowledge, or the ‘absolute ideal’. A great sketch of this, albeit never stated by Hegel himself, is *thesis–antithesis–synthesis*. The thesis is the original idea; the antithesis contradicts the thesis; and the synthesis resolves the conflict. There is a fourth path, the negative dialectic, wherein the thesis–antithesis is not resolved: take Marx’s famous line in the Communist Manifesto, “The history of all hitherto existing society is a history of class struggles...ending either in the revolutionary reconstitution of society or the **common ruin of the contending classes**...,”¹ for example. But that is not important for this intro.

Marx (as is a common phrase) *turned Hegel on his head*. Where Hegel applied the dialectic to human knowledge and strove for the perfection of human knowledge, Marx believed that “Men’s ideas are the direct emanations of their material state.”² Or, to use another quote from him, “My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of “the Idea,” he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of “the Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.”³

He applied the dialectic to class struggle and actual material conditions. He used it to track the progression of society through different historical stages. His philosophy is concretely **materialist**: it is based on the notion that the world is made up of matter, and the interactions between matter. Therefore, it excludes (and often explicitly rejects) idealism, metaphysics, and theologian concepts.

Going beyond the purely philosophical-theoretical foundations of Marxism, one must look at the actual content of its historical

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848)

² Karl Marx. “The German Ideology” (1846, published 1932)

³ Karl Marx, preface to “Capital: Volume One” (1863)

Section Three: On General Labels

The first and most obvious question that arises from the social construct of labels is thus: what material purpose do they serve? It is clear and easily observable that labels delivered a measure of freedom in the queer movement. Labels offered a unifying banner, a direct call to action, and a simple definition. However, times have changed and the queer movement has come to a halt. Intense labeling has done nothing to stem the tide of murders that follow LGBTQ people. According to a Huffington Post article: “...hate-motivated homicides of LGBTQ people were up a whopping 86 percent nationwide in 2017 over the previous year, according to a report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.” In my analysis, labels serve only one constructive purpose: identifying groups for analysis. Labels allow statisticians, reporters, etc. to identify and report on certain groups. The terms “gay” and “lesbian,” etc., obviously make it easier for violence against them to be tracked, for racism within to be analyzed, and so on. But has any of this mass of reporting actually changed the present state of things for queer people? As we have seen, violence is actually increasing against us. We aren’t going to be saved by the Human Rights Watch or the Southern Poverty Law Center or any other bureaucratic organization that tracks such statistics. As Stirner once wrote, “Freedom cannot be granted. It must be taken.” By self-labeling we are only starting the process of our own social reduction and detracting from our Unique. What, then, is the solution?

Section Four: On Freedom and Practical Determination

Some may say that the solution is to abolish labels, lashing out at anyone who uses them, and refusing to participate in social reduction. While the goal is clearly to abolish labels, such a reaction

Demigender: the subject is only partially connected to a certain gender

Abrosexual: the subject's sexual orientation is fluid

Apogender: the subject feels 'entirely removed' from the concept of gender

...and the list goes on. The common argument in favor of endless labels is something is thus: labels are crucial to self-discovery.

As Alex Myers writes in his article "Why We Need More Queer Identity Labels, Not Fewer," for Salon: "These labels save lives. These labels create a powerful sense of understanding and self-acceptance. The fact that the acronym has become a target for mockery only indicates the amount of work that still needs to be done around LGBTQIA+ civil rights."

What truly stands out to me in this excerpt is the claim that labels save lives. How so? Reactionaries are against queer people on the basis of innate qualities, not labels or self-identification. It does not matter whether someone identifies as pansexual or bisexual, demigender or genderqueer. What this article actually does is perpetuate a liberal narrative: queer liberation is when queer people find the perfect label for themselves, and then fit themselves in this box in a way that pacifies their inner dialogue and fits into the hetero/cis-normative status quo.

We are never going to out-label queerphobia. Micro-labels are not a step towards freedom in any sense. They dilute queerness by insinuating that variations of sexuality are inherently queer. They reduce unique aspects of queer people: by giving these variations a label, they are generalized. One person's "lithosexuality" is not the same as another person's. This is what makes one gay/lesbian/bi/ace/aro person different from all the others. Instead of recognizing and embracing our Uniqueness, we, the queer community, are instead compartmentalizing the variations inside the boxes we've already created. In short, the social reduction continues.

analysis. In the Marxist view, as mentioned before, history is a series of class struggle. The previous historical epochs were developments of the previous. They had internal contradictions that lead to their demise. The most recent case of this is feudalism's transition into capitalism. In this case, the middle class was the revolutionary class, and the nobility were the ruling class. Feudalism advanced to a point where the conflict between the two classes could not be reconciled. Mercantilism advanced to generalized production of commodities, the middle class (serfs, journeyman, etc.), became the bourgeoisie, the new ruling class. The guilds were dissolved, royal figures executed, production diversified, property laws instituted (in the form of forced *enclosures*), and old customs banished. The strict moral codes and obedience to authority was replaced with the obscurity of social relations behind commodity exchange. The mythos of feudalism: kings, queens, honors, duties, were dissolved (although this took longer in certain nations, such as Russia, than in others). Where these roles could not simply be destroyed at once, they either lingered for a time, or were tokenized and made essentially meaningless (like in Britain). This all coincided with the development of productive forces. The Industrial Revolution was the catalyst for the transition. Not only did the class struggle intensify near the end of feudalism, but it was accelerated by the rapid deterritorialization and disintegration caused by the development of technology. The rapid invention of complex machines and tools rendered impossible the intense stratification of labour, and the closed-door specialization of guilds. The productive forces of society tear through old social relations like an icepick through a frozen lake.

The next step in understanding Marxism is the economic side. Now, I will not go into detail on this in this introduction, but I will give a brief overview. In Marxist economics, exchange-value (the value of commodities in relation to each other) is determined by the average amount of (socially) necessary labour-time needed to create said commodities. Therefore, the value of an item in-

creases as it becomes more difficult to make (as it requires more time to make). This isn't to say that if one worker spends an extra hour on a product, it is worth more. That means nothing. It would make a difference if the amount of time to make a commodity increased from around, say, thirty minutes, to around two hours. This theory of exchange value refers to **average** labor time, not **individual** labor time. How are prices determined? They are influenced by exchange-value. Prices don't always correspond directly to exchange-value. The market prices float around the price of production, which floats around the exchange value. And the law of value can be affected by other phenomena (such as supply-and-demand). It is a law of averages, and it only provides a referent price. The function of exchange-value and the network of social relations that maintain it (and commodity production) are commonly referred to as the 'law of value'.

Before the next topic, it is crucial to understand the Marxist conception of the state. This is perhaps best described with a quote from Friedrich Engels:

“...people think they have taken quite an extraordinary bold step forward when they have rid themselves of belief in hereditary monarchy and swear by the democratic republic. In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy...” (Friedrich Engels, Introduction to the 20th anniversary edition of “The Civil War in France” [Karl Marx, 1871])

The most relevant, and most important aspect of Marxist theory is the historical stage(s) after capitalism. This is commonly divided into three sub-stages:

1. **The dictatorship of the proletariat, or the proletariat organized as the ruling class**

are essentially their own canvas. Refer back to the section “An Elaboration of Stirnerite Marxism” for further explanation.

What labels do is define one in terms of their social relations. Say someone is 'gay'. They are, then, a 'gay man', a 'member of the gay community', etc. This may then be paired with occupational roles ('gay fireman'), family relations ('my gay brother', for example), and so on. What does any of this mean? There are many gay people, many fireman, many brothers. In labeling someone so, we reduce them to a point in a mass. We don't recognize them as a unique being, but rather as an individual part of a mechanized whole. This is useful when analyzing discrimination or oppression: not so much when appreciating a person. This process is not done singularly to people. It is also done by people. Self-labeling initiates the process of social reduction. In a world where capitalist forces alienate people to the margins, many find comfort and validation in social reduction. It allows people to not only forge an identity, but also to make themselves part of something. But this feeling is not a fulfilling one. No one is freed by piling on labels; they may gain temporary satisfaction (as it can be a euphoric experience to have one's feelings described accurately), but the end result is the further minimization of one's real self.

Section Two: On Micro-Labels

The age of the Internet has been the dawn of a new age: the proliferation of micro-labels. Labels that describe, compartmentalize, and name every possible variance in gender identity and sexual attraction. What this does is take unique aspects of people and reduce them to parts in the general social milieu. Examples of micro-labels include:

Lithosexual: the subject experiences sexual attraction, but does not want it reciprocated

Sexual Egoism: A Critique of Labels

In societies where the modern forms of oppression prevail, queerness presents itself as an immense assemblage of labels. But a spectre is haunting the community: the spectre of micro-labels. Micro-labels, such as ‘demisexual’ (only attracted after an emotional connection is established), ‘bigender’ (having two genders simultaneously), and ‘pansexual’ (attraction to ‘all genders’, or ‘regardless of gender’), and others, are an attempt combat alienation by labeling and describing absolutely every possible variation in identity. I want to make one thing clear: I am not an exclusionist and I don’t discount someone’s queerness because they use micro-labels. This is a critique of labels, not the people who use them. Furthermore, micro-labels are merely the most extreme example of a larger problem in the queer community: the proliferation and valorization of labels themselves.

Section One: On the Self

In his seminal work *The Unique and Its Property*, Max Stirner wrote, as I quoted before: “I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I create everything as a creator.” Stirner argued that the subject is not defined by the social duties put on to them, nor the roles they arbitrarily serve. Rather, they are Unique beings. It is they, themselves, who create their essence. They are products of society in a physical sense, but mentally and psychologically, they

It is important to note that this is actually not a communist stage. It is the historical stage that is, to use a common Marxist phrase, ‘stamped with birthmark of the old society’. In this stage, the working class formalizes into a state, violently oppresses the bourgeoisie and other counter-revolutionaries, and creates the material conditions for communism (namely, the abolition of classes, the snuffing out of the law of value, and the abolition of work [forced labor]).

2. **The lower phase of communism, or socialism**

This stage is classless and entails the withering away of the state. In some theorizations, it would involve the handing-out of labor notes on the basis of the hours worked by individual workers. Other theorists reject this, claiming that the productive forces are developed enough for the distribution of goods without any bureaucratic mechanism.

3. **The higher phase of communism, or the final stage of human development**

In this stage, communism has been fully achieved. There is not distinction between labor and free time, between mental and physical labor. Self-interest is the primary motivator, and diversified interests (and the means to fulfill those interests) eliminate alienation. It is a stateless, classless, moneyless society.

In the vein of materialism and Marxist analysis, Russian revolutionary theorist and leader Vladimir Lenin expanded upon and developed these theories. He solidified the idea of the vanguard — that is, the organization of the most class-conscious members of the proletariat with the goal of leading the masses through revolution — that Marx only briefly touched upon. Lenin believed that it was unlikely that the masses could become entirely class-conscious (aware of their situation and relation to the mode of production), and therefore it was necessary for the vanguard to take

the form of a tightly-organized and philosophically-theoretically uniform party. This is believed, in Leninist theory, to be a natural outgrowth of communists being the most class-conscious members of the working class. The vanguard party arises out of the masses in the field of class struggle. It is one of a multitude of parties that arise in such a process. It is very important to note that Lenin did not advocate for a one-party state in his theories (although this line did not exactly reflect his actual actions, unfortunately). It was Stalin who developed the line of a one-party state.

Lenin also made another crucial contribution to Marxism: imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. Just as mercantilism was the highest stage of feudalism (the previous mode of production), so imperialism is the highest stage of our current mode of production. As capitalism decays, the capitalists become more desperate, and end up using nation-states as blunt tools for economic exploitation. As explained in Lenin's work "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism": "Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving for domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations — all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism which compel us to define it as a parasitic or decaying capitalism."⁴

Marxist theory obviously encompasses many more works and ideas from Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and goes far beyond them, but this is the basics.

2. On Theory (and Ghosts)

"Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement."⁵ This obvious yet crucial statement from Vladimir Lenin is more important now than it ever was before; the socioe-

⁴ Vladimir Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism" (1917)

⁵ Vladimir Lenin, "What is to be Done?" (1903)

The following was originally published by me as an article on this website. It has been slightly edited for the purposes of this book. It is added as a bonus addition to this book because it is relevant to the other subject matter. And, of course, queer liberation is class struggle.

Addendum

conomic conditions of present society leaves the working masses in a state of mental paralysis — we do not know what our fate is, with looming-yet-small, urgent-yet-distant issues such as climate change, the rising spectre of fascism, the rise of national-populism, and the increasingly polarized yet indistinct mainstream political factions (Democratic Party vs. the GOP, Labour vs the Tories, and so on). It is then crucial for precise and thorough analysis of our present conditions.

The programme of the international proletariat has become fractured and subdivided, in such a way that reunification is impossible. We cannot hang onto the ghosts of the past any more than we can vote in communism. Old programmes, old theories, waste away and wither over time. There will not be a new Marxist-Leninist nor Trotskyist nor any other sort of traditional Leninist party to rise from the ashes of the workers' movements. The reason for this is fairly simple: the old workers' movement is dead, the social relations from whence it sprung have either faded, mutated, or altogether changed. We cannot cling to these ghosts lest we become the sort of revolutionaries that Marx described in his essay "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte": "And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language."⁶

We must break the paralysis of late-stage capitalism. We must band together, support each other, and create new revolutionary theory, through Marxist analysis, that accurately describes our material conditions and addresses the present and distant courses of action. If the person reading this is not a Marxist, and is scoffing at my words, I can only advise two things: read, and never stop

⁶ Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1852)

reading, and always, relentlessly and unceasingly, strive for your liberation and the fulfillment of your true desires.

END

of thought-being, or other spiritual-metaphysical conception, nor any other idealist notions. 'I think, therefore I am', is as redundant and laughable as saying 'I walk, therefore I am'. You are novel, unparalleled and distinct in a way that is simply not definable nor quantifiable. My acceptance of the near-entirety of Stirner's philosophy is perhaps a small break, a step out of line with strict materialism, but I am willing to accept this. It is foolish for any thinker or theorist to reject a concept because it lies outside their domain.

Defining Stirnerite Marxism

The subtitle of this book is, of course, 'An Introduction to Stirnerite Marxism', but up to this point, I have not properly defined the relation between Stirnerism and Marxism. What must be stated is that my communism is simply not complete without Stirnerism. It blends with it in a symbiotic relationship. My egoism feeds my communism, and communism fulfills my egoism. My pursuit of self-realization necessarily leads to my acceptance of the real movement. Stirner's critique of sacred duties and morality (phantasms), is complementary to Marxist critiques of ideology. It is clearly necessary to trample underfoot sacred edicts, bourgeois morality, and abstract ideals in pursuit of the abolition of class society.

The consistency of capitalist reification and perpetuation lies in its ability to maintain passivity, quell dissent, disguise the mechanisms of commodity exchange, obscure social relations, colonize social life, and present itself in an illusory way through spectacular representation. It is beyond the point of necessity for us to 'put on the glasses', as Žižek would say (a reference to the movie "They Live," where the protagonist puts on a pair of glasses and sees the ideological messages behind advertisements, commodities, people, etc.) We must break free. Forward, always forward! Death to capitalism and anything that stands in our way!

Egoist-Communism

I am not a communist because of any abstract ideal of 'the people' or 'the greater good'. I am an egoist: that is, I seek my own fulfillment above all else. I am a communist because I seek a life beyond wage-labor. I am a communist because I seek my own liberation as a queer person.

In his work, "The Unique and Its Property," philosopher Max Stirner wrote:

I am owner of my power, and I am so when I know myself as Unique. In the unique the owner returns into his creative nothing, from which he is born. Every higher essence over me, be it God, be it the human being, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and only pales in the sun of this awareness. (Max Stirner, "The Unique and Its Property" [1844; new translation 2017])

One of the main problems, then, with Stalinism and Maoism is that they often present communism as an altruistic endeavour. Stalinist regimes erected monuments and created flyers that praised national heritage and exalted the workers of the nation. Through its own spectacle it distorts Marxism.

Anti-Workerism

A common misconception is that socialism means worker ownership of the means of production. In stark contrast, socialism means the *abolition* of work. The proletariat exists as a class in relation to

the means of production. They do not directly control the means by which things are made, thus they must sell their labor-power on the market. In short, their labor itself is a commodity. With this in mind, it therefore seems absurd for the workers to overthrow the current system only in order to reshuffle it and continue selling their labor.

Commodity Production

Marx identified the key aspect of capitalism as ‘generalized commodity production’. That is, the creation of items to be bought and sold (not directly consumed or used) as the basis of the economy. ‘Market socialism’, as it is often called, seeks to reshuffle the relations of production but keep this feature intact. Believers in this ideology believe that if the economy is run in such a way that workers are all entrepreneurs (therefore receiving the whole profit instead of a wage), or form co-ops wherein they split the profits, that this is socialism. Others propose further changes; the abolition of rent; the abolition of *all* private property, etc. I rebuke this notion and deem it nonsense. It is clearly and obviously still capitalism. The production of commodities and the functions of the whole market still operate. No mere change in the relations of production can change the underlying features of capitalism. And the idea of abolishing private property whilst keeping the market in its modern form is absurd. Capitalism operates by commodifying everything – including land. As Marxist theorist Amadeo Bordiga put it: “The real danger lies in the individual enterprise itself, not in the fact that it has a boss.”¹

¹ Amadeo Bordiga, “The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism” (1957)

system. Gender roles unify and reify the separation of individuals based on arbitrary schema and ontological biology. And so on. Stirner even views the label of ‘human’ as a phantasm, classifying individuals into the formless grey mass of ‘humanity’. As he wrote: “the human being is mind, therefore all powers that are alien to him, the mind – all superhuman, heavenly, inhuman powers – must be overthrown, and the name “human” must be above every name.”¹

This leads to another central concept – the Unique. Stirner believed that every individual was fundamentally different from every other, in such a way that (abstract, theoretical) unification was absurd, and labeling was inherently a reduction of one’s real self. Life is a constant struggle between self-realization and unified separation—that is, the stratification of individuals combined with the assemblage of the separated and alienated individuals. Individual subjects are, in fact, the born as the ‘creative nothing’; “I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.”² Individuals are born as this nothingness, and all other titles are alien to them and put onto them by society. The key problem in this is not just the role of society in the application of labels onto people-but their acceptance of them. The subject is freed from this particular slavery when they recognize themselves as unique beings reject these labels. Any and all labels are a prison, a cage constructed to chain individuals. You may have a name, but you are not your name. You may have a job, but you are not your job. You are not John, or Sarah, or a chef or a plumber or an accountant or other occupation. Neither are you a brother or sister, mother or father, aunt or uncle, You are you, and the essence that defines you, beyond the obvious and immutable physical reality of material being, is intangible. What lies beyond the physical grasp of a person? Not some Kantian sense of duty, nor Hegelian sense

¹ Max Stirner, “The Unique and Its Property” (1845; new translation 2017)

² Ibid.

An Elaboration on Stirnerism

Who was Stirner?

Max Stirner was a 19th century individualist philosopher and social critic. He was originally a member of a group of radical intellectuals known as the ‘Young Hegelians’, where he first came into contact with future rival Karl Marx. He was, however, ruthlessly critical of the other Young Hegelians. His masterpiece, “The Unique and Its Property,” is riddled with attacks on them. He was unequivocally against universal truths and objective generalizations.

In short, Stirner’s philosophy is a vicious critique of sacred truths and common conduct. He was a warrior against the status quo, in a time where active acceptance of the system was commonplace.

Onto his Philosophy

Central to Stirner’s philosophy is a concept called the ‘phantasm’ (often more roughly translated as ‘spook’). A phantasm is first a construct, a socially constructed yet universalized ideal (or notion that is *made an ideal* [idealized through the process of valorization and separation from pure thought]) held above the individual. Second, it is such an ideal that is both not recognized to the individual and either directly or indirectly harmful to the individual. The phantasm is not an ideal in terms of Hegelianism, a pure abstract thought. It dominates the human mind, determines activity. Notions of law maintain social stratification and reifies the existing

Workerism in Marxism

The goal of Marxism is to abolish the proletariat as a class. This would lead to the end of class society — as the only remaining class, the bourgeoisie, exists in relation to the proles. To valorize work is to ignore the fact that the social relations of a class maintain their social function. As DZ Rowan wrote in their essay, “Communization for People in a Hurry”: “...the relation of one class to the other and the function that class has in society is one in the same. The proletariat is defined not only by their condition as those without ownership of the means of production but also by the consequence of that, the consequence being that they have to sell their labor in order to survive.”² It is not radical then, and certainly not Marxist, to valorize and/or maintain the status of proles as working subjects. Anti-work is synonymous with anti-capitalist.

The Soviet Union was infatuated with a slogan: ‘Those who shall not work, shall not eat’. This is a ridiculous notion and emblematic of that state’s issues. From the beginning, the Soviet Union was focused on industrialisation. The belief was that the ‘material conditions’ for socialism needed to be developed before wage-labor and commodity production could be abolished. They were mistaken. It is necessary to develop the productive forces and material conditions for socialism but it has to be an international system. As Marx once wrote:

And, on the other hand, this development of productive forces (which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their world-historical, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it want is merely made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced; and furthermore, because only with

² D.Z. Rowan, “Communization for People in a Hurry” (2018)

this universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established, which produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the “propertyless” mass (universal competition), makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of others, and finally has put world-historical, empirically universal individuals, in place of local ones. (Karl Marx, “The German Ideology” [1846])

He elaborates:

Without this, (1) communism would only exist as a local event; (2) the forces of intercourse themselves could not have developed as universal, hence intolerable powers: they would have remained home-bred conditions surrounded by superstition; and (3) each extension of intercourse would abolish local communism. Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples “all at once” and simultaneously...(Karl Marx, “The German Ideology” [1846])

The folly of the Soviet Union was therefore threefold. One: they conflated the lower phase of communism with the dictatorship of the proletariat: the historical stage wherein the proletariat overthrows and actively suppresses the bourgeoisie. Two: they claimed they had achieved socialism, therefore confusing the meaning and insinuating that there can be commodity production and wage-labor under socialism. And three: they reinforced a workerist position and inserted this ideological hegemony into the Comintern (thus making it the dominant line in the global communist movement).

other queer people, the wandering and aimless erotic experience of true travel, the poisonously joyous event of unhinged euphoria and fun, celebration separated from societal codes and boundaries, every riot and rally, everything that is hated and reviled and cast down upon by society, is in fact the revolutionary act of transforming our daily life. In the words of beloved philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche:

“We imagine that hardness, violence, slavery, peril in the street and in the heart, concealment, Stoicism, temptation, and devilry of every sort, everything evil, frightful, tyrannical, raptor- and snake-like in man, serves as well for the advancement of the species “man” as their opposite.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, “Beyond Good and Evil” [1886])

Forward! Death to everything that stands in the way of our fulfillment!

ues. Roman state officials convened to change the state religion and specifically craft Christianity to suit the needs of the ruling class. Form the BBC: "... Christianity offered spiritual comfort and the prospect of salvation on the one hand, and attractive new career paths and even riches as a worldly bishop on the other... Some hundred years after Constantine's 'conversion', Christianity seemed to be entrenched as the established religion, sponsored by emperors and protected in law..." Of course, this came after a long struggle in Rome, and was a slow and agonizing process: one that took centuries. And remnants of Paganism and ancient Greek morality persisted long after. But what this shows is the power of religious moralism and its use as a weapon by the ruling class.

In modern times, the dominant system of morals presents itself as though it doesn't exist. It often hides under the guise of a 'religious atheism'. It is not specifically tied to deities or commanded from any higher authority. This is precisely because that is not necessary. Our moral system (by which I mean the average, universal standards of conduct that are standard across common moral codes) shapes our social modes on a subconscious yet infinitesimally perceptible level. The commandment to go to work, to not actualize our desires outside of the liberal-democratic framework, to passively accept bourgeois democracy, the pathetic limitation of self-expression (as seen in the outrage against gender nonconforming trans people for example, or the outrage against overweight individuals showing skin [that feeds the diet industry], as examples), and so on, are accepted even by those who disagree with them, by the act of compliance. The major lesson of modern critiques of ideology is that one doesn't have to agree for ideology to function; it can seamlessly incorporate critiques of itself as long as the (vast) majority of people simply *comply*. Doing is the first and only commandment of our social structure.

It is with this in mind that I make the following proclamation: any and all hedonism, slovenliness, thievery, refusal of work, the unabashed and unashamed self-expression of transgender and

On Moralism and Ideology

A common mistake made when assessing Marxism is that it is an ideology. An ideology is a set of ideas that shape (or aspire to shape) our material-social reality. Marxism is a method of analysis; it analyses social relations, economic conditions, and historical patterns. What Marx and Engels avoided doing was prescribing an *exact* plan or organization for the communist movement. They never precisely described the organization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for example. It is a matter of principle that we avoid ideology. Ideological hegemony may ease the process of organization and provide a plan of action, but it prevents analysis of current material conditions. We should most definitely not bind ourselves to an ideology crafted nearly one-hundred years ago by a man who believed there could be "Socialism in One Nation."

Development of Ideology

"They know what they are doing, but they are doing it anyways."¹ This is how Marxist theorist and philosopher Slavoj Žižek described the compliance of the working class with late-stage capitalism (flipping the phrase Marx used to describe it in the 19th century). He theorised that the vulgarities of modern capitalism are apparent and that proles merely accept and actively ignore them. His theory of ideology is distinctly different from the classical Marxist definition of ideology (that of a false-consciousness,

¹ Slavoj Žižek, "The Pervert's Guide to Ideology," directed by Sophie Fiennes (2012)

a mask over reality which prevents the subject from seeing the true state of things). In his masterpiece “The Sublime Object of Ideology,” he writes:

If our concept of ideology remains the classical one, then today’s society must appear post-ideological: the prevailing ideology is that of cynicism; people no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological propositions seriously. The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. And, at this level, we are of course far from being a post-ideological society. Cynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironic distance, we are still doing them. (Slavoj Žižek, “The Sublime Object of Ideology” [1989])

Therefore, the act of participating in capitalism, even when the subject doesn’t actually believe capitalist narratives, is a form of ideology. In that way, ideology is not something to *escape* or *pierce through*, it must be destroyed.

Moral systems work this way in general. A system of justification for the current state of things. Moralism at its very heart must dissuade people from activities that interfere with the perpetuation of capital. The act of providing for oneself is demonized as thievery. Actual, material rejection of work is demonized as laziness. The family in its current state is an ideological construction backed up by moral justifications. It is a hierarchical system of dependence that perpetuates capital by forcing the dependee to provide. In their manifesto for the writing collective ‘Ultra Left International’, DZ Rowan writes: “All immoral actions and ideas are at heart, in their purest form, are rejections of work based sacrifice, and are primarily deemed immoral for that reason. Theft, forms of violence, any form of sexual activity that isn’t heterosexual, sexual deviancy, etc., are all, while they may not necessarily be healthy for everyone involved, are unproductive in the greater capitalist sense and cannot be profitable to the capitalist state (because the proletariat would cause an outrage).”²

A truly dialectical approach to analysing morals, presents a real-historical sketch of their class character. In the classical analysis of morals, they are analysed solitarily, within the conditions of one specific period in history. In going beyond this, analysing them in their fluid development over the course of history, it becomes nearly impossible to ascertain a universal origin or a common thread.

In ancient Sparta, the act of murder was a part of life; it was not commonly demonized. With the conquering of Greece by Rome, and the eventual rise of Judeo-Christian morality, this sort of brutal, warrior-oriented morality morphed into strict obedience to state authority and valorization of empire. We see here the dialectical contradiction between ancient Spartan brutality and the needs of expansion of empire and rank-and-file authoritarianism. The synthesis of this was, of course, as stated before, Judeo-Christian val-

² D.Z. Rowan, “Ultra Left International: A Manifesto” (2018)

and be dominated by money), are fundamental in shaping our social being. If one is living in poverty, for example, they may have to: hold multiple jobs; go without food; live on the street; resort to crime, and so on. Social commandments obligate us to remain within this system. Even the serial thief is within the system, just attempting to *take from it* rather than give to it. What is holding all of us back from seizing the world for the purposes of our own pleasure?

All around us, by the billions, people make the daily march to their daily jobs. They work forty hours a week to have two days to themselves. The moral idea at play in this phenomena is productivism: the idea that society must create for the sake of creating, advance technologically for the sake of advancing, and all members of society have an obligation, a duty, to contribute (it is interesting to note that this does not seem to apply to wealthy elites who spend their time doing leisure activities and contributing nothing). Productivism is a pervasive myth, a constant message, an idea and a phenomena that is so pervasive that it has become an ideology structuring our reality. Even those who despise work, or hate their job, still go to work every day. Hatred of productivism has been reincorporated into it and commodified. How many scenes in TV shows and movies have you seen where a character or group of characters complains about going to work? Countless. How many scenes in TV shows and movies have you scene where a character or group of characters viciously critiques the notion of daily work? Probably at least a few. But what is the prevailing message here, the myth that structures work? 'We must work! Even if you hate work, it's *just the way things are!* If we didn't work, everything would fall apart!' We see in this message a crucial function of moralism and ideology. An activity that is determined, perpetuated, and reproduced by our current mode of production is justified after the fact in a way that determines our social relations and mode of activity. It is presented as a fact.

The Spectacle (-Commodity Society)

Revolutionary theorist, art critic, and filmmaker Guy Debord developed the idea of 'the Spectacle' in his groundbreaking book "The Society of the Spectacle." Simply put, the 'Spectacle' is a set of social relations shaped by capitalism and mass media. Or, as he put it,

The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the permanent presence of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production. (Guy Debord, "The Society of the Spectacle [1967])

In simpler terms, it is the reification of capitalist ideology; it is the result of commodification of social life, an upside-down world where all desires and interactions are either expressed directly *by* a

commodity, in the *act of buying* a commodity, or in the *general participation* in commodity society. The media aspect is paradoxically the most hidden and the most visible aspect of the spectacle. As a point of clarification, the media in this context does not simply mean media organizations (CNN, Fox News, NBC, and so on). It encompasses all visual manifestations of this mode of production: billboard advertising, radio and TV commercials, reality TV shows, etc. Upon analysis of media, it becomes apparently obvious that it both maintains the current state of things (passive), and perpetuates it (active). In the modern age, it is no longer just the companies themselves that advocate for the consumption of commodities, it is near **every** corporation.

One such example is the “holiday” commonly called Christmas. Christmas centers around commodity fetishisation in a way that other holidays do not. It is completely modeled around the buying of commodities. For an entire season, people spend loads of money to buy gifts for the annual ritual. Some even go to extreme lengths (as exemplified in many Youtube videos of Black Friday chaos). This vulgar consumerism is masked by a large mythos — “love” and “family time,” and “tradition.” Commercials are produced showing bright and happy children laughing with their parents. It is presented as a time of love and charity and brotherhood. All to mask the gross amount of sheer money spent on goods. From Investopedia: “According to a study performed by the National Retail Federation, Americans will be spending more money on gifts in 2018 than they did last year. Gallup reports that:

US adults estimate that they will spend approximately \$885 on gifts this year, slightly lower than 2017’s expectations...Holiday sales are expected to increase 4.3 and 4.8 percent over 2017 — \$717.45 billion to \$720.89 billion. It should come as no surprise that the average cost of gifts is so high. With advertisements for big

Moralism and its Consequences

A Brief Critique of Moral Arguments

Basing party lines or revolutionary theory on moralism is an egregious mistake. Doing so either: presupposes moral hegemony, or unconsciously binds the party or theorist to convincing others of a set of moral ideas. Principled Marxists and materialists should recognize and acknowledge that morals are not universal; different material conditions produce different social relations; different social relations produce different ideas in the minds of men. As Marx wrote: “Men’s ideas are the direct emanations of their material state. This is true in politics, law, morality, religion, etc..”¹ If morals are not universal, then it is fruitless to pursue moral arguments. One limits the scope of their arguments to those who align with said morals.

Against the Religion of Moralism

From the day we are born we are a product of our material conditions. How we relate to other people, where we live, how we live (in a literal sense), our socioeconomic status within our social class, our employment status, access to basic necessities (or lack of access), health, etc., that are at once a direct result of the mode of production (as it is what requires to sell our labour on the market,

¹ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology” (1886, published 1932)

itself” (Slavoj Žižek, “The Sublime Object of Ideology” [1989])

sales everywhere, there is a greater chance for impulse buys and overspending.”

Does this seem like wholesome, pure, family time?

But this is exactly the function of the media in the Spectacle. It flips the script — it presents non-commodified social relations as out of the ordinary, and commodified social relations as the norm. In many cases, as with Christmas, it presents these commodified social relations as a mythified, deified, holy tradition. Such is the case with most other holidays, anniversaries, and so on and so on.

Do not take this as a shaming of those who participate. We all take part in the Spectacle-commodity society, whether we are conscious of it or not. This is the essential element of it. It presents itself as both part of, outside of, and *in addition to*, capitalist society. It is at once open and hidden, vulgar and refined.

The Commodity

At the heart of the Spectacle is, of course, commodities. But what exactly *is* a commodity? It would be a gross mistake to simply say it is an item. Let’s begin with Marx’s classic assessment in *Capital: Volume One*: “A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference. Neither are we here concerned to know how the object satisfies these wants, whether directly as means of subsistence, or indirectly as means of production.”¹

In late-stage capitalism, the commodity has expanded. Capitalism drives us to consume as much as it drives us to produce. The most important lesson to be learned is that a commodity is never just an item. Consumers buy a message along with the product

¹ Karl Marx, “*Capital: Volume One*” (1867)

itself. A myth is embedded within the commodity. You aren't just buying a Starbucks coffee — that money is going to plant a tree in Brazil! This Apple Watch will make you healthier!

Let's look at an example: in the case of Coca-Cola, the myth of refreshment has become so embedded within the beverage that it's almost indistinguishable. But we all know that the more one drinks of it, the thirstier one gets. This is another property of the commodity — the endless desire for more. Capitalism feeds on an endless need for desire. As Žižek put it: "The ultimate melancholic experience is the experience of a lack of desire itself."² Therefore, the experience of a commodity is threefold; one, the commodity itself (a coffee, a watch, a soda, etc.); second, the message embedded within the commodity (tree planting, refreshment, spiritual or mental fulfillment, etc.); and three, the need for desire, which is claimed to be fulfilled by commodities. The Spectacle is the ultimate culmination of this commodity fetishization. It molds our desires to fit our mode of production. Many a capitalist has spoken of 'supply-and-demand'. But what comes of this if the demand is manufactured and the supply is beyond it?

A starkly apparent example of this phenomenon is the massive overproduction of food. From an article in The Guardian:

"As much as half of all the food produced in the world — equivalent to 2bn tonnes — ends up as waste every year, engineers warned in a report published on Thursday...[The UN's] report, Global Food; Waste Not, Want Not, found that between 30% and 50% or 1.2–2bn tonnes of food produced around the world never makes it onto a plate."

Marx referred to this as the *crisis of overproduction*. In simple terms: when a capitalist overproduces commodities (in pursuit of

² Slavoj Žižek, "The Pervert's Guide to Ideology," directed by Sophie Fiennes (2012)

profit), this leads to a buildup of goods that cannot be sold. So, the capitalist closes down the factories and cuts down the workforce up for this, leading to crisis (of the sort we see often under capitalism). The motivating factor behind the race to produce is another Marxian phenomenon: the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Capitalism operates by continually expanding the technology that upholds it — its self-perpetuating in that way. What this leads to, however, is a decrease in value. Because value of commodities is the expression of the average socially necessary labor-time needed to create commodities, automation (which creates no value) actually *decreases* the profits of the capitalists.

Now, how does the spectacle fit into this? As explained, the crises of capital are created by phenomena of the capitalist system. It is not that the spectacle is causing this or directly affecting supply-and-demand. Rather, through its mechanisms it shrouds the process. Why would anyone question overproduction if they are led to believe that buying a new watch is essential? We are all baptized in the religion of commodities and we don't even acknowledge. Capitalism *relies* on this. As Žižek wrote in his book "The Sublime Object of Ideology":

"The crucial paradox between the social effectivity of the commodity exchange and the 'consciousness' of it is that — to use again a concise formulation by Son-Rethel — 'this non-knowledge of the reality is part of its very essence': the social effectivity of the exchange process is a kind of reality which is possible only on condition that the individuals partaking in it are not aware of its proper logic; that is, a kind of reality whose very ontological consistency implies a certain non-knowledge of its participants — if we come to 'know too much', to pierce the true functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve