

Capitalism, Therefore Crisis

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“Life is short, and Art long; the crisis fleeting; experience perilous, and decision difficult.”

Hippocrates, **Aphorisms**

I

For Hippocrates the word “crisis” designated the culminating point of an illness, on the basis of which, after a thorough examination of the symptomatic data and taking into account the evidence, he could establish a criterion with which to make his diagnosis. The end point of critical reasoning, the correct diagnosis, is not easy, since not all the factors may be evident at the same time and often one illness will conceal another. If we apply this reflection to our current situation we find ourselves facing an apparently economic crisis that provokes immediate reactions, affecting the skin, guided by a tactical point of view that remains on the terrain of parliamentarism and capital. The crisis is inherent to the capitalist regime, since its normal functioning consists in the constant subversion of the social relations upon which it had previously been based. Each stage liquidates the previous one, and therefore one cannot confront the crisis without directly attacking capitalism, but the responses that have traditionally arisen address its consequences rather than its causes. They do not question the foundations of the system but only complain about its malfunction. Protests decry the loss of the “welfare state”, that is, the decline of the wage level of the masses of consumers, and in addition, the decline of employment and credit; the low quality of public services, social assistance and the party system, the greed of the bankers, and to top it all off, the dictatorship of international finance which is imposed on the majority of the population thanks to the mediation of the politicians. It therefore appears that they can allow solutions within the framework of the dominant economic and political system, by way of legislative and executive measures that would reduce the critical impact on the masses of wage workers and indebted consumers, thus preventing the phenomena of exclusion. The solution must therefore come from the hands of an interventionist state rather than by way of its abolition. Capitalism will have to undergo yet more development in order to create enough low-paying jobs instead of disappearing. As is the case in Medicine, however, here, too, a superficial crisis can dissimulate other more profound and less visible ones.

II

The crisis is political, it is urban and it is also ecological. It is the culminating point of a social and cultural illness whose symptoms are undeniable: loss of memory, dissolution of classes, individualism, narcissism, degradation of language, functional illiteracy, fear, domestication ... and the resulting human type itself explains the lack of popular reaction to this crisis. It is the conjunction where the political class monopolizes all the public institutions and becomes fully autonomous, defending its own interests as part of the ruling class. At the very moment that urban growth accumulates millions of impoverished people in the fringes of the big cities while simultaneously annihilating the rural and natural environment, we are becoming aware of the depletion of natural resources in the face of an unlimited demand for them. And when the circumstance of global warming of the planet arises as a response to the pollution of the atmosphere by greenhouse gases. But the real and complete understanding of the crisis leads to a second

level of questioning. Then critique is directed at the nature of the system and does not settle for band-aids or reforms. Conscious individuals have to reconsider the way of life that they would like to lead, the organization of their time and space, the model of society they have to live in and, finally, that society's metabolic equilibrium with nature, in order to elaborate a comprehensive, long-term strategy of collective intervention. They have to question the system in its entirety and not just its most degrading aspects.

III

The question of the subject occupies the central place in critical thought. The radical transformation of society requires a social agent to carry it out, one that must necessarily be born from the accession to consciousness of the people who are most affected by the crisis. The problem lies in the fact that this subject cannot be constituted within a totalitarian system, one in which domination penetrates and seizes all aspects of life. This subject must be formed by means of desertion or exclusion. The processes of secession are slow, because they depend on personal decisions under difficult circumstances; they are problematic, because the system does not favor life on the margins; and they are susceptible to deviations from their goals, since they tend to overemphasize one aspect of their secession, cooperation, to the detriment of the other, the struggle, which is why their anti-capitalism is often sidetracked towards experimentation within capitalism. On the other hand, however, involuntary exclusion, often enclosed in the urban periphery, imprisoned in areas that have been abandoned by the system, responds to the economic violence causes it with a violence under the opposite sign, but the vandalism of the excluded is not an attempt to change the world, but forms a part of this world. Desertion is also a cultural phenomenon, but total deracination prevents the street gangs of looters from constructing a free community, even one based on predation, such as were constituted, in another time, by the associations of corsairs: all they have is rap music and what they need is an authentic culture of exclusion. So far, only those communities that have resisted the social relations of the market, the indigenous populations not engulfed by the way of life imposed by capital, have been able to forge a social subject capable of elaborating a project of social transformation, by extending their communitarian structures both into the adjacent rural areas as well as the urban neighborhoods. The best example of what we are talking about is the 2006 Commune of Oaxaca.

IV

One thing that is clear is that the collective protagonist of the solution of the crisis will arise from communities of neighbors, not from organizations of the vanguard, trade unions or councils. Such communities are not necessarily the result of an exodus to the countryside, since anti-capitalist secession can also take place within the conurbation. Indeed, given the current state of the population, the outbreak of hostilities will necessarily take place in the decomposing urban areas. It is in the urban areas where the masses have to "take to the hills". The rural advance parties can open up the way forward, but the crisis will really break out only when the conurbation explodes, which will take place, for example, if the lack of fuel causes supply problems. The inevitable energy crisis, by paralyzing transport, will lead to successive food crises with disastrous consequences for survival in the metropolis. In the highly developed capitalist

countries where there are no virgin zones where a community could survive and radiate its influence towards the urban space, the territorial conflict in the rural areas could very well play the role of catalyst of this community, but the largest number of participants will come from the masses confined in the cities. Furthermore, the urban struggle can make sense if it is also engaged in the defense of territory. De-urbanization will follow the same road as urbanization.

V

The processes of ruralization will at first have to engender mixed communities in a double sense: agrarian and urban, on the one hand; and communities engaged in the labor of creation and that of struggle, on the other. The most important battle that has to be won is the one that is being waged already against progressivist ideologies and the staunch defenders of the continuing development of the productive forces. This battle is being fought for the most part on the terrain of the critique of science and technology, that is, on the terrain of the critique of the dominant industrial culture, because the disintegration of this culture of growth, of consumption and of progress, without use value, must give birth to a counterculture of fraternity and the gift, without exchange value. This counterculture must not exist as a sphere that is separate from the rest of the communitarian activities, but as an internal space of free creation involved in the anti-industrial transformation of society. For this reason it will be more similar to the old popular culture than to the classical culture of the elites, and will be more oral than written, for, in homage to the liberating experiences of the past, this culture will be created in order to be spoken, not to be read or “audio-visualized”. Oralization is the cultural counterpart of de-industrialization, just as dialectization is the abandonment of the standardizing techno-culture of late capitalism. The local dialects spoken in the communitarian spaces will replace the specialized jargons of the virtualized spaces of power. The future revolution—a revolution is nothing but the end of a crisis—will encounter its adequate means of expression in the argot of those who fight for freedom.

VI

The current crisis, the threshold of a depression in every sense of the word, introduces us to a scenario of profound change and traumatic rupture, where it is impossible to reverse course. The consequences will be of momentous importance. Society, as the kingdom of the irrational and the arbitrary—as the domain of the spectacle—has become too unstable and too unreal. The necessary conflicts will return the world to reality, but it will be a warlike reality. The social struggle, like war, only unfolds in the realm of risk; it breathes an atmosphere of danger. Its development is unforeseeable: it might immerse us again in the worst nightmare or it might just get us out of this mess. Victory is never certain but the crisis is a factor in its favor. It shows us the vulnerable points of the enemy, the points where it is feasible to attack with guarantees of success.

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