

On the Economy Considered as Black Magic

A Metaphysical Critique

Tiqqun

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Contents

I – The Commodity and Equivalence	6
1.	7
2.	8
3.	9
<i>Notes.</i>	9
4.	11
<i>Notes.</i>	11
II – Exchange in General	13
5.	14
a) Gift	15
6.	16
Remark	16
7.	17
Remark	17
8.	18
9.	19
10.	21
Remark	21
11.	22
Remarks	22
b) The inversion of generic relations	24
12.	25

13.		26
	Remark	26
14.		27
15.		28
	Remark	28
16.		29
	Remark	29
17.		31
	Remark	31
18.		32
	Remark	32
19.		33
	Remarks	33
20.		34
21.		35
22.		36
23.		37
24.		38
25.		39
26.		40
	Remark	40
27.		41
	Remark	41
28.		43
	Remarks	43
29.		44
30.		45
31.		46
32.		47

33.		48
34.		49
	Remark	49
35.		51
36.		52
37.		53
	Remark	53
38.		54
39.		55
40.		56
	Remarks	56
41.		57
	Remarks	57
42.		60
	Remarks	60
43.		61
	Remarks	61
44.		62
45.		63
	Remarks	63
46.		64
	Remark	64
47.		65
	Remark	65

“Hornsocket! We will not have demolished it all completely until we’ve destroyed even the ruins! And I see no other way of doing it besides balancing it out with beautiful, well- ordered buildings.”
– Alfred Jarry

I – The Commodity and Equivalence

1.

The commodity is, essentially, the absolutely equivalent thing. This can be seen whenever two commodities (one of which is often money) are exchanged for one other. Marx denounced this equivalence as an abstraction, for good reason: it is an abstraction that has become real.

2.

Quite naturally, Marx sought the concrete foundations of that abstraction. He thought he'd found such a foundation in use value, in value as utility. For Marx, use value has no mystery about it; it is the bare state of the thing, its very body – its physical reality. Moreover, and consequently, use value is not at all implied in the logic proper to exchange value, which is a logic of total equivalence: “as use values, commodities have – above all – different qualities.” Marx remarks, furthermore, that use value is not something specific to commodities (for instance, the air we breathe is still not for sale), and he implies, as if it were an obvious fact, that it does not even presuppose the commodity world.

But we will see that not only that use value, which appears at first glance to be something trivial and self-sufficient, is in fact something quite problematic and full of metaphysical subtleties, but also that it itself is the foundation of an abstract logic of equivalence, inseparable from the logic of exchange value that Marx criticized.

3.

The perspective of the metaphysics of the useful was summarized as follows by Hegel: “since everything is useful to man, man himself is useful to man as well, and his fate is, equally, to make himself a member of the flock useful to the community and universally of service. Just as much as he attends to himself, he must lavish just as much of himself on others, and just as much as he lavishes himself upon others, he must attend to himself; one hand washes the other. Everywhere he finds himself, he is there on purpose; he uses others and he himself is used.

“One thing is useful to another, in another way; but all things have this reciprocity of utility in their very essence; indeed, they have doubly to do with the absolute: one is positive, where things exist in themselves and for themselves, and the other negative, where things are for others. The relationship with the absolute essence or religion is thus the supreme utility among all utilities, because it is the purely useful itself; it is this subsistence of all things, or their being-in-themselves and for themselves, and the fall of all things or their being for another thing.” (Phenomenology of Spirit)

Notes.

1. *The “discourse” of the negriist cretins is reduced to this tawdriness. These people, more than a century after Marx’s very regrettable chapter in Grundrisse “Immaterial Production,” still thoroughly enjoy that late-in-coming Mandevillian excrement, to the point where they’re still spreading it all over the place with their dirty paintbrushes. There they are, these gourmets of muck, licking their lips and assholes in a peaceful enumeration of all the Xs and Ys that could have been “put to work,” from the soul to the emotions by way of the revolving door-becoming of their immaterial vinaigrette. Rather than figuring out that work has finally showed itself to be something inessential, something that in itself is without foundation, these stinky imbeciles sing the ambiguous glory of the supposed magnitude of the useful, while in fact, as it is conceived by utilitarianism (that is, as a relationship capable of configuring a world), the useful is nowhere to be found! And this supposed magnitude, anyway, should be ample proof of that. From one day to the next, the concept of usefulness more and more designates everything and anything, and that shows that in fact it designates nothing. The petty, cunning utilitarians invoke the usefulness of the useless but do not see the uselessness of the useful. What is everywhere — blueballs!- isn’t usefulness, but utilitarianism.*
2. *The absolute essence, seen through the opera-glasses of supreme usefulness, can then either (still) be called God (like it was for Voltaire for instance), or, among those for whom God has explicitly become a useless hypothesis, it can be “society,” where the supreme usefulness then gets called by more specific names, like: The Greatest Happiness for the Greatest Number of People (Bentham found this puke when reading Beccaria – “massima felicità divisa nel maggior numero” – and gargled it), The Wealth Of Nations, economic growth, etc., or more flatly*

need, as an abstraction. In any case, it always ends up subsuming within it the relationship of things to themselves and to each other, and comprises a pedestal of general equivalence, equivalence as the foundation upon which all that can come out between things is a negative relationship, a negative relationship which itself is subsumed into absolute essence as the supreme usefulness (the so-called wealth of refined needs, that branch office of supreme usefulness). Exit the negative! To the delight of all the world's grocers, this charming concept – and all its avatars, from the early naïve theories of the social contract to the modern ones, including that of flat, militant, pro-communication democratism – by smothering the flames – even the hottest! – that burn under the frozen marsh of ignoble social positivity. But, much to the displeasure of these good sirs, those dead waters are haunted, by what ghouls we shall now see.

4.

Use value is to need what Marx considers that exchange value is to labor: use value is the abstract need crystallized in a particular thing, which appears as a purely specific quality of that thing, because need is presented as something general, abstract. “The intention according to which all things are, in their immediate being, either as they are ‘per se’ or something good” is in so many words returned to the thing, and comprises the metaphysical foundation of exchange value and commodity abstraction.

Notes.

1. *This is how we’ll be making our critiques — over the length of this article, and more generally, over the length of these Exercises in Critical Metaphysics — of the double-edged sword of utilitarianism that we’ve passed from mouth to mouth for far too long, formed from all the mucus of commerce and mixed with economist bile cooked up on the driftwood of a certain Marxism that has by now quite visibly become counter- revolutionary; this infinite certainty of having exhausted our Being and Mind thanks to magical concepts of usefulness, need, and interest. — This mortuary scholasticism, still paying for its millions of Pierre Bourdieus, which is quite simply the flattest discourse that the commodity can sustain about itself, is contradicted each day by the simple existence of the commodity itself.*
2. *This is what a certain Jean Baudrillard almost understood, in his call to make a criticism of the political economy of signs, not without a certain tension of mind unusual for this good fellow, it’s true. But he foolishly believed that a simple reference to some Absolute would be enough to invalidate utilitarianism... Whereas, indeed, what makes the metaphysics of the useful despicable — because it is, effectively, a particular metaphysics — is not that it has a relation to the Absolute, but rather the modality of this relation, the fact that this relation is conceived of as the supreme usefulness, the fact, in sum, that this metaphysics is false. And mister Baudrillard assimilates it to Christianity, and deplores that still no one has buried this filthy transcendence along with all the old- fashioned metaphysics. This is what takes off Baudrillard’s mask and shows him to be a super-utilitarian, when he affirms an identity between Christianity and use value — without even the slightest laugh — merely because of the fact that both of them participate in some kind of transcendence — a transcendence that our gentle post-modernist schoolboy can obviously only think of abstractly as some kind of transcendence or other, and in the modality of the supreme “useful.” And so, not only does this pig establish a general equivalence between all the moments of metaphysics, he even falls under the beguiling illusion of the utilitarians, who believed their thinking to be “guaranteed without any metaphysics.” Imbecile, if you’d read Péguy (Situations). you’d know just how portable metaphysics is! What world do you think you’re fidgeting in? Does all the telos inscribed in the heart of things disgust you so? Apparently everything that’s effectively inscribed in it presents the risk*

that it might just sweep you aside... And so, you and all the other post-modernist dogs howl yourselves to death screaming that all that is but illusion, that nothing exists; that you don't give a fuck, and anyway that you're getting your income from the University and the cruel politeness of your doglike colleagues – utile e onore [need and honor], perhaps.

3. *It's this metaphysics of the useful that lays the foundation of utilitarianism in its two moments, the one of which is called theoretical, the other normative (Cf., notably, A. Caillé's Critique of Utilitarian Reason). The former, which claims to explain all the acts of men, considered as isolable individuals because of the utility that anybody can find in any one of them separately, is obviously the only anthropological representation that could possibly grow from such a poor metaphysical hummus, wherein all relations are conceived of as relations of utility. Normative utilitarianism, which, supposing the other to be true, considers that all that is quite fine, and adds that the supreme utility is the supreme Good; which is nothing more than the morality, supposedly immanent, that is consecutive to said metaphysics. You can't seriously attack utilitarianism if you don't attack its foundation, the metaphysics of utility.*

II – Exchange in General

5.

The majority of false ideas about the ancient/old world are based on the eternalization of commodity categories, and belief in their naturalness. What modern man believes himself to be, he also believes all the men of the past to have been as well, with the slight difference that he thinks they were less perfectly so. The thread of our demonstration will take us on a tour through the field of ruins covering this fine evolutionist tranquility.

a) Gift

6.

Primitive society still appears to certain people as being the society of pure neediness. But need is not the primary fact of humanity: it is not the condition of all human life, nor is it that which was present at the beginning of human history. Far from being primitive, need is rather a product specific to modernity.

Remark

Utilitarianism would like to grant that needs are historical, that needs change with social organization, etc. However, even the supreme utility is relative to a particular era, since the society it involves the reproduction of is not always the same. Functionalism is an elastic kind of utilitarianism – but this elastic snaps under the tension of history. What is historical is not only the mode of being of needs, nor even merely their essence: the simple existence of needs as needs is not an anthropological invariable, but an historical creation whose global spread is relatively recent, as is that particular mode of life which is called survival. We also know that it is precisely the appearance of the modern market that created scarcity, that “presupposition” of the so-called economy.

7.

Primitive exchange takes on the form of gift.

Remark

*There is nothing more false than the notion of barter. All Adam Smith's speculation start from Cook's error regarding the Polynesians, who climbed on board his ship and proposed to the Europeans an exchange, not of objects, but of gifts. The notion of barter – which is supposedly a utilitarian exchange of goods considered as equivalent and in which all would be lacking for it to become commodity exchange would be currency... – d was born in the 18th and 19th centuries, from utilitarianism as we know it. Marcel Mauss gathered together a considerable number of facts dealing with various primitive societies under the head of the concept of the "gift" (cf. His essay, *The Gift*), and expressed a few of its universal traits. It now seems that we would hardly be overstepping ourselves to generalize his discovery to all primitive societies. In passing it should be mentioned that all the modern robinsonades start from the same idiotic postulate: to wit, that something called homo economicus lived in caves and on islands – a farce all the more amusing considering that no such species has ever existed, even in the London-style "City," where nonetheless certain cave-dwelling sorcerers called "stock traders" abound.*

8.

In the way it is represented to us, gift-giving appears above all as an isolated act, where one person gives up a good to another. But isolating an act from the totality of social life like that seems, rather, to be mere abstraction.

9.

Gift, as the simple act of giving, immediately poses beside it two other acts, two other moments: receiving it and returning it.



Adam Smith's *homo economicus* in its natural environment, engaged in financial speculation from the depths of the cave.

10.

But, in fact, of the three *former moments*, *giving*, *receiving*, and *returning* the gift, only the lattermost appears to be the one that makes it into a cycle, because the gift given in return will itself be received and returned. In the primitive world, debt is permanent. This cyclical aspect of gift reveals it to be the unity of these three moments.

Remark

*It was in this that Levi-Strauss objected to Mauss, in his preface to the anthology *Sociology and Anthropology*; to wit, that “it is exchange which constitutes the primitive phenomenon, and not the distinct operations that social life is broken down into,” or, as Mauss himself had already put it in his *Essay on Magic*, “The unity of the whole is even more real than each of its parts.”*

11.

But what is exchanged are not goods, words, polite remarks, services, etc. What is exchanged in the primitive world is the *gift* itself. That is, exchange is the exchange of exchange. And so, the gift, as the unity of these three moments, is reflected back into the moments that make it up and into its simple means of reproduction. Primitive man gives so that Gift can be, and because Gift is. The thing itself that circulates is but the symbolic reflection of Gift itself, as the figure of *Publicity* (Publicity in the sense of a mode of public expression), the being-for-itself of the World – this is what Mauss calls a *total social fact*.

Remarks

1. *The gift as a unity of the three moments is but Gift revealing itself as a figure.*
2. *Then we see that gift is not motivated by need, but by Gift. This explains the fact perfectly “useless” objects, with no “use value,” are primarily what get exchanged, to the great surprise of the utilitarian observer. One might cite the case of the vaygu’a of the Trobriand Islands, described by Malinowski (in *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*), two particular types of which, the soulava and the mwali, establish in their exchange what is called Kula, and in sum the whole social organization of a very extensive district. But a soulava can only be exchanged for a mwali, and vice-versa. These vaygu’a, which are respectively large necklaces and armbands, are often unusable as finery because of their dimensions or because of their heavy symbolic content. In the same way it thus becomes clear that – contrary to an idea widespread in the West and defended by Aristotle and Marx – costumes are exchanged for costumes. In sum, once one has grasped the total aspect of Gift there’s nothing mysterious anymore about the fact that labor itself is subordinate to Gift; not only does the producer give the whole material product of his labor to someone else (for instance to his step-parents, whereas he himself will receive everything his sons-in-law produce) – but, more symbolically, that labor itself is the object of great pride on the part of the producer and above all a significant Publicity (we cite, for instance, the aesthetic concern – and the resulting efforts – a Trobriand gardener has for his garden, and the ritual he carries out, which consists in piling up the yams he’s grown in conical piles, and keeping anyone from seeing them). And indeed one might say that work is a form of exchange, that is a manifestation of Gift. And Gift, as a figure of Publicity, also appears as a unit of labor and exchange. Add to that the fact that material scarcity is generally absent from primitive life, and the commonplace idea that says that man has always worked for his subsistence and that he did so more in the primitive world than in any other, because of some hypothetical insufficiency that the “means of production” supposedly had to meet just as hypothetical a set of “needs,” is knocked flat. In fact, the primitive world aspired to little more than to Publicity, and it had quite ample means to attain it. It only lacked the public consciousness of Publicity as Publicity: the Publicity of Publicity.*

3. *A remark in passing on Voyer, the buffoon-dialectician. We've taken his concept of Publicity; he didn't deserve to keep it, since he wasn't able to do anything else with it after his Introduction to the Science of Publicity, which was nevertheless a pretty good book. But one could already see his intolerable defect even there: Voyer has an instinctive hatred for SILENCE. And so he wanted to believe that Publicity was definitively and absolutely based on itself, which is obviously false (in the same way, the concepts individual and human race have an inexcusable defect: they hide, under a self-satisfied immanence, the incompleteness of man; there is still a remainder, and that remainder is Bloom). We can then see that this concept, which is supposed to float somewhere up among the high summits of the Spirit, was able to give birth to that anorexic and positive little mouse, "communication," or to a utopia as cretinous and repulsive as gab and gossip. All the contortions and grimaces Voyer can make won't hide the fact that he too "forgot" to consider the negative as it lays in the place where people buried it... How could such a pseudo-trobriander of contestation ever comprehend that the conflict between Publicity and Spectacle has been transcended, and in the final analysis is actively mediated by Silence (certainly the Spectacle is an alienated Publicity, and thus is Publicity denying itself, but Silence – that is, the Invisible – is the negation of that negation); that the negation of the Spectacle is not only the negation of dictatorship in visibility, but also the negation of the dictatorship of visibility; that the silent destroyers of Turin have espoused the formidable weapon form of that negation, and that it is precisely because of that that they are destroyers! And so, out of his passion for visibility, Voyer, that rusty weathercock, has made contestation invisible; and he can go ahead and spin around, leap about, and howl for us to watch him carry on with his deplorable clowning – epistolary or otherwise – all he wants, but we'll just leave him there, in indifference, and to the scorpions.*

b) The inversion of generic relations

12.

Posed as separate, the individual and the [human] race remain abstract. It is only in their relationship – insofar as the race takes form in individuals, and the individual can only define him or herself as an individual, that is, as a social being, within *relationships*, which draw their substance from the race – in their being for one another, that they attain concreteness. The unity in which these moments, the race and the individual, are as inseparable, is at the same time different from them; it is thus a third term alongside them, which is found precisely to be none other than Publicity itself, that which forms the absolute basis for *relations* or exchange as pure exchange.

13.

The *Generic relationship* is the same thing as Publicity, but in the generic relationship the two terms going from the one to the other are better represented as the one resting outside of the other, and the generic relationship as taking place between them. Wherever the individual and the race are present, this third term must also be present; because they cannot subsist independently – contrary to what is abstractly posited by economism and its “methodological individualism” – but only exist in Publicity, that third term. It is in the unity of Publicity that the generic relationship can become something concrete.

Remark

At the same time it is quite clear that the generic relationship takes place via relations, or exchange.

14.

Thus Gift, as the figure of Publicity, is a specific figure of the unity of the human race and the individual — and corresponds to a specific modality of the generic relationship.

15.

In this modality, individuals are, as *personages*, absolutely differentiated from one another *a priori*, and realize their difference through exchange, which is gift. And this gift itself is singular, as an act that takes place between specific personages. So much so that the object given, as a symbol of Gift, appears immediately to the primitive consciousness as the singular symbol for all the singular gifts that he has participated in and will participate in giving. Furthermore, things, in the primitive world, are themselves reputed to be absolutely unique, differentiated, singular and personal (that is, *endowed with personalities of their own*).

Remark

Thus Malinowski remarked, in The Argonauts of the Western Pacific, that “each quality Kula object has its own name, and in the form of a story or legend it has its place in the indigenous peoples’ traditions.” And Mauss says, concerning certain Amerindian objects: “each of these precious things, each of these signs for all this wealth, has – like it does among the Trobrianders – its own individuality, its own name, qualities, and power. The big abalone shells, the shields they cover in them, the belts and blankets adorned with them, the decorated blankets themselves, covered with faces, eyes, animal and human figures, woven into and embroidered upon them. The houses, their girders, the walls themselves are beings. Everything speaks; the roof, the fire, the sculptures, the paintings – because the magical house is built not only by the chief or his people, and by the people from the brother tribe across the way, but by the gods and the ancestors; the house itself receives and vomits out the spirits and the initiated youths. “Each of these precious things furthermore has a productive virtue to it. It is not just a sign and a pledge, it is also a sign and a pledge of wealth, a magical and religious principle of rank and abundance.” (Essay on the Gift). We may furthermore remark that things themselves are the performers of the gift, or rather of Gift. They themselves are also personages, and participate in and with the race as its Community. Nonetheless, though two things, like two human beings, are incomparable in the primitive world, a thing and a human being, as we will see now, can be united by a bond of identity.

16.

The immediate symbolic unity of a primitive object and the personage that is *temporarily* the performer of this thing as a relation, as a gift, is *possession*.

Remark

In the primitive world, it happens that the thing itself is identified with its possessor, to the point where it has the same name and the acts of the one can be considered as emanating from the other. We see then how absurd it is to still believe in any primitive communism. Furthermore it must be noted that possession does not designate a bond with the thing as utility. I can give you my vaygu'a if you desire it, but it will remain mine and if you exhibit it in the village, it will be exhibited as mine and will participate in and with my glory. Furthermore, we've already seen that the things in question could have no other use besides as something to be given. Hegel already said it in Principles of the Philosophy of Right: "the will of the property owner that a thing be his own is the primary substantial basis, the ulterior development of which – use – is but its phenomenon, its specific modality, and must come only after the establishment of that universal foundation." And this ulterior development, in the primitive world, quite quickly takes on an aspect of contingency.



Hong Kong Board of Trade-
**“There is no doubt
that the only result of
the inexhaustible
and profound belief
in this magic is to
render it *almost*
effective.” (Bronislaw
Malinowski)**

17.

In the gift cycle, the human personages involved affirm their common humanity, their common belonging to the human race. The personage-things exchanged themselves also affirm their belonging to a common race, their being of a kind. At the same time, the cosmic unity that brings together all the personages, things, and men, is reproduced; the living reproduce the living.

Remark

We can here cite the example of a Kula incantation, cited by both Mauss and Malinowski, which expresses this common belonging to a race / being of a kind, affirmed on the basis of an irreducible a priori singularity of the partners. The incantation says, notably:

Everything diminishes, everything stops!
Your rage diminishes, it dies out, oh man of Dobu!
Your war paint is fading, it's going away, oh man of Dobu!

Then:

Your rage, oh man of Dobu, shall subside like the rage of a dog when he has just caught the scent of a newcomer.

Or:

Your rage is going out like the tide; the dog is at play,
Your anger is going out like the tide, the dog is playing around, etc.

*Aside from the obvious — that this means appeasement and communion surging forth, whereas supposedly rage, radical singularity in fact, reigns a priori, there is a second explanation given for this evocation of the dog, an explanation of indigenous origin: “Dogs play nose to nose. When you speak that word, dog, as has been forbidden for a long time, the precious things come out too (to play). We gave bracelets; necklaces will come. The ones and the others will find each other (like dogs that come around sniffing).” Mauss comments on this as follows: “The expression, the parable here is beautiful. The whole plexus of collective feelings comes out at once: the possible hatred of associates, the aloneness of the vaygu’a coming to an end through enchantment; precious men and things gathering like dogs playing and rushing up at the sound of voice.

Another symbolic expression is that of the marriage of the mwali, the bracelets, the feminine symbols, and the soulava, the necklaces, the masculine symbols, which tend towards one another like the male to the female.

These various metaphors signify exactly the same thing as the mythical jurisprudence of the Maori expresses in different terms. Sociologically speaking, it is once again the blend of things, values, contracts, and men that is being expressed.”(ibid.)*

18.

All the partnered personages, people and things, emerge from the gift cycle with their singularity confirmed, shimmering with having bathed in the fountains of the substantial: in being-of-a-kind.

Remark

*Here, primitive possession is contrary to modern private property in that it is no case so alienable as to be “reformattable.” Things retain the memory of all the gifts that they had ever participated in. Thus, a primitive man will be able to recount the historical or mythical exchanges that a given thing has participated in. This is the basis for the renown of the thing, and its value. In the same way, the renown of men is built, perpetuates itself, and is ceaselessly put back into play in Gift. This is the primitive manna. Its law is that of agon, the conflict of peers as social bond.

Moreover, Gift organizes singular and permanent bonds as well. For example, Kula is practiced between permanent partners, and there is a privileged bond among them.*

19.

But in the primitive world, each community, as an Interiority, affirms itself as the whole race itself. And for *us*, and for universalist consciousness in general – what we’re dealing with here is more like a fragmentation of the race as a human totality. This fragmentation of the human race into *species* is the condition for the subsistence not only of each fragment as a fragment, but also and above all of Gift, which as a figure of Publicity also reveals itself to be the greater unity of the fragments.

Remarks

1. *In order to obviate any messily biologizing interpretations of this thesis, we clarify that we’re only using the term species here for lack of any other, to convey the idea of a fragmentation of the human race into subunits, irreducible Interiorities, even though they are rooted in their unity within the race as a whole. Thus the above theses should be re-read in light of the idea that where the generic relationship comes into it, this generic fragmentation of the human race steps in as well.*
2. *In the primitive world, relations are primarily face-to-face, and cannot remain as such over too great a distance. Also, each primitive society establishes what is inside and what is outside of itself, and only those that are inside can be recognized as participants in the human community, in the human race. Gift has to do with the inside, and only the inside (an interiority that can, moreover, bring in a rather large number of tribes). Exchange with the outside, with the foreign, when it takes place, occurs according to what Marshall Sahlins calls negative reciprocity – a form similar to commerce, or to pillage. Gift defines the internal, by positing limits that enclose the race and the personages. At the same time, the Gift also defines each community or society as internal, and also defines the fragmentation of the race as a whole, as much as it does the affirmation of each fragment as being the race.*

We can thus understand the power of destruction that the great universalist religions were able to wield over primitive communities (even though, regardless, primitive societies had a certain capacity to incorporate into their mythical unities beliefs that came from outside, as the instructive example of the Cargo cults in Melanesia shows).

20.

In Gift, the generic relationship presents itself above all as the process of realization of the individual personage by means of the race, and its fragmentation into species. The race appears in the species, as if it were appearing on its own final, absolute frontier, and thus realizes itself in the personage himself, and becomes the united community of singular personages. The personage, like the community, has a concrete existence, and Publicity is *effectively* present and unitary inside each community (but then Publicity breaks down into different interiorities, and the appearance of one interiority for another is that of an exteriority, although that other is also an interiority), although it is still not understood as Publicity.

21.

The modern world presents, quite visibly in the era of the *Spectacle*, a generic relationship that is a *reversal* of the Gift relationship.

22.

Bloom, that being without particularities, is equivalent *a priori* to any other Bloom or rather to the Blooms as a *mass*, and thus, as a Bloom, is *absolutely* equivalent. All the particularities that he frenetically exhibits are in fact for him something outside himself, and their banality reveals itself in the end as a *ruse of equivalence*.

Remark: *To the insolent question, "Who hides behind an Audemars Piguet watch?" that was recently spit out of the Advertisers' bag of shit-streaked tricks, the answer is obviously: nobody.*

23.

Bloom's permanent agitation, his desperate effort to build an *appearance* of personality, a *personality as appearance*, reveals the appearance as an act both *of* Publicity and *for* Publicity. And in fact, Bloom evokes these small primitive tribes whose lives revolve around affirmations of prestige. It calls to mind the pride that a Trobriander takes in his piles of yams. Nothing resembles a Trobriander's display more than a storefront window or a *cool kid's* clothes.

24.

However, it cannot be said that primitive man is *superficial*. His truth – and this proves Hegel right – is *immediacy*, or rather the unity of the totality and the appearance of the totality, that is, *Publicity*; but then only as an immediate unity. It's *Publicity* that still doesn't know itself to be what it is, which has not attained to the *Publicity of Publicity*, *Publicity* purely *in and of itself*, which is still not *for itself*.

25.

Inversely, Bloom's world is the world where Publicity at last appears. And the primitive world is the beginning that this world deserves. Our era is the era when Publicity has finally appeared, as the truth of the primitive world. Advanced capitalist society is thus *the first primitive society*.

26.

But if Publicity is visible today, it is visible only in its absence. Because Publicity appears at the hands of each Bloom. But no Bloom experiences the unity of the world and its appearance; that is, Publicity. On the contrary; confronted with his own misery, he sees in the apparent happiness of the Other only a contradiction, something terrifying, which impels him to build an appearance for himself: *The Other has stolen his life from him*; he's never lived anything, and this dispossession appears to Bloom as a horrifying *curse* that he must at all costs hide since he can't completely forget it. But the Other, the impersonal "they," is also he himself. The world we "live" in is thus the world where the appearance of Publicity comes up against Publicity; but this division is itself split: Publicity's exteriority to its own appearance is also Publicity's exteriority to itself, a *split* in the heart of Publicity, insofar as the latter is precisely the unity of *what is* and *what appears*. This split in Publicity, which then only unites its two moments as separate, is, precisely, the Spectacle.

Remark

Alienation creates the conditions for its own transcendence. It is precisely because Publicity is absent that it can finally appear, by appearing as something necessary. And it is, in the end, the alienation of Publicity into Spectacle that shows us Publicity as Publicity.

27.

To this split in Publicity which is the Spectacle there also corresponds a becoming- abstract of the individual and the human race. In this movement, the individual becomes Bloom, the individual without individuality, the abstract individual who seems to be no more than an accident of the human race or rather a means for or it to remain purely of a kind; that is, as the human race abstractly, as masses. Simultaneously, the race itself, as the pure, abstract, mass human race, appears to lose all its organic nature and become a simple ensemble of atom-individuals.

Remark

Bloom often attempts, with the use of apparently particular commodities, and with roles (in the sense of the term used by the Situationists) – roles that not only generally organize themselves around commodities, but are themselves commodities ontologically speaking, as the following section of this article makes clear – to capture a simulacrum of individuality. He sometimes attempts to take on a reassuring pseudo- belonging to some puppetlike community or other, one of those that manage a poor substantiality (we note that this pseudo-belonging has for Bloom the advantage – which becomes even a necessity – of reducing the tyrannical power of the Other, that thief of life, that demiurge, by taking it down to proximity; thus it can be tamed, gotten used to... – and this spiteful relationship between enemies, between strangers, is in general the basis for that abject state still called “friendship”). This is what the disgusting ad-men of the commodity and certain of their sociologist colleagues dare to call a “tribe.” But if this abstract form of a species is a tribe, it is clearly but the tribe of roles and of the commodities that organize it, rather than that of the Blooms themselves, who are merely the mediators of the all- important communication that things engage in so as to ever further appropriate the Common, and ever further alienate Publicity.



Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*.
“The spirit of nature is a hidden one, it does not manifest itself in the form of a spirit: it is only a spirit for minds that know it, and it is spirit in itself, but not for itself.”

28.

In the Spectacle, that figure of Publicity, equivalence triumphs. One atom is equivalent to another atom; atoms are *absolutely* equivalent, and the human race is revealed as simply the universal and absolute reign of equivalence, as the absolutism of equivalence.

Remarks

1. *On the other hand, the absolute equivalence of Bloom as equivalence to Bloom's abstract Self is also for him the illusion of his identity with himself, of pure subjectivity. That's what makes Bloom tend to become so massively relativist.*
2. *This atomism and generalized split in Publicity might be considered a kind of closing down, a shrinking of interiorities as discussed in theses 19 and 20, a closure around the lone individual, who consequently cannot exist any longer as an individual, as an atom. Note that this signifies a radical foreignness among all men, and the extension of this foreignness; that is, the alienation of Publicity. Because the foreigner, as simply a stranger, is only negatively characterized relative to interiorities; for each given interiority, each "inside," everything that is foreign to it is handled as equivalent. Here we find Bloom's absolute equivalence once more. And then we see how the practice of commerce has from the beginning gone hand in hand with the alienation of Publicity.*

29.

The whole aim of *relations* is thus to make singularity appear, to create singularity as appearance. But this appearance of the totality as a fabric of singularities is in external opposition to the totality, which in reality is alienated into an absolute equivalence.

30.

The generic relationship is thus the movement from which the *a priori* absolute equivalence emerges from the relationship as confirmed, ever more powerful, and ever more tyrannical, as an appearance of singularity, or rather of simple particularity. In this sense an *inversion of the generic relationship* takes place. Nothing is more antinomic to a Trobriander *display* than a storefront window or a *cool kid's* clothes.

III – Critical Metaphysics

And the social puzzle

Has revealed its final combination

André Breton

31.

Two commodities are *a priori* and veritably *equivalent*. It is only superficially, and secondly, that they present themselves as *singular*. A commodity must always present itself as singular; that's what gives it all its *mana*. It is only thus that it is desired, that is, that the idea of exchange as equivalence, which is contained within it, becomes public, and can then participate in the magical act of consumption. And this is an act that confirms its absolute equivalence in exchange, before the absolute equivalence of use affirms itself tyrannically as a speedy impoverishment among all the Blooms that have bought it. And the singularity that had appeared also shows itself as a mere commodity singularity; that is, as perfectly undifferentiated. The *mana* has gone out from it.

32.

This singularity is first of all undifferentiated because each species of commodity is produced and consumed on a mass scale, and because that mass is comprised of identical objects. It is then also undifferentiated because the pseudo-singularities themselves, which appear to differentiate the various species, reveal themselves to be merely abstract. What was really desired – and was lost at the very moment it was believed to have been obtained – is commodity *manna*, canned substance for individuals without substance, *pure* singularity, general singularity, something totally abstract.

33.

But this substance is more like a kind of *active nothingness*, so much so that the commodity is in fact like pure form, an empty shell, simply a dead fragment of a broken and emptied vase. And this *formal substance* is *essentially* defined by its manner of appearing as a pure, immediate presence, and it is only to realize its essence as a pure, immediate, and abstract presence that it must be made to look like a singularity. Its apparent singularity is what allows the commodity to realize its concept, by appearing as something immediate and free of any mystery, whereas in reality it is profoundly magical. The fact that the commodity must be magical in order to *effectively* exist as a commodity, while for the very same reason hiding its magical nature – because it must also be pure immediacy and pure evidence – is what characterizes it as the union of the profane and the sacred, not as transcended but as separate. The commodity is not the transcendence of the profane and the sacred, something borne of them. It is, rather, the simple *sodomite* union of these two moments, which does not transcend them but merely *muddles* them together, as is customary in the world of *Qlippoth*.

34.

The reason that the commodity's form and substance are presented, not as inseparable moments transcended in a higher unity, but simply as subsumed into abstraction by a hypostasis of their form, is that the commodity is in fact *objectivized being-for-itself* presented as something external to man.

Remark

And so, value is not "crystallized labor," as Marx believed; rather it is crystallized being-for-itself.



[The manna's escaping. Let's reinvent magic]

35.

But at the same time as this external being-for-itself, this objectivized Publicity, is what is most desirable in the era of the Spectacle, where the split in Publicity also means the absence of being-for-itself – the absence of Publicity – at the same time, this *being-for-itself* wrapped in cellophane, this *mana*, is what is most evanescent.

36.

Because this *being-for-itself*, in consumption, remains external to the consumer. And this exteriority denies him as *being-for-himself*, as reflexivity. And that's why the *manna* escapes, and why the consumer is insatiable.

37.

But then, the commodity, rather than as a simple externally objectivized *being-for-itself*, reveals itself to be the object principle of the *absolutely*-exterior-being of this *being-for-itself*, and thus also of the exteriority to itself of the being-for-itself, and appears as precisely the very mediation that separates Bloom from being-for-himself, and separates the totality from its appearance – and the movement of the commodity is the movement of the splitting of Publicity.

Remark

In other words, the commodity is the active mediation of being-for-oneself-as- much-as-for-any-other (in the sense that in the Spectacle the Other is always the impersonal PEOPLE); that is, poor substantiality. But this poor substantiality is always “internalized” as being-for-oneself-as-another, or: it is the mediation of reification.

38.

The Spectacle is the commodity that shows itself in the end to be a *figure of Publicity*.

39.

The inversion of the generic relationship of human beings is also the diffusion of generic relationship of the commodity.

40.

This generic relationship is an essential property of the commodity as a *pure phenomenon*. In effect, 1) it is the process of its appearance; 2) Insofar as it is inverted, it presupposes by its absolute *a priori* equivalence, the total *platitude* of commodities, their blueprint-being, their declared absence from Interiority. Now, this pure phenomenality affirmed by the commodity, insofar as it is itself a phenomenon, is immediately supersumed. And this pure phenomenality also reveals itself as a *mode of disclosure*.

Remarks

1. By “supersume” we mean, by a classic translation, the *hegelian aufheben* (which simultaneously means to suppress, preserve, and transcend).
2. The commodity presents itself as *platitude itself*, and the confession of that *platitude*, as the declaration of the non-existence of any mystery. But this manner of appearing is itself mysterious. That was already explained in thesis 33.

41.

As such, and as the form of pure commodity phenomenality, the inverse generic relationship is a *metaphysical* property of the commodity: what is super-perceptible is the *phenomenon as phenomenon*.

Remarks

1. *in effect, classically, the super-perceptible is something beyond the perceptible, as an Interiority inaccessible to comprehension. In such a exasperating situation, where the Interiority is like something empty (because the result is assuredly the same as one would get upon putting a blind man among the treasures of the super- perceptible world – though has treasure in it, it hardly matters whether that treasure is the content proper to this world, or whether consciousness itself comprises that content – or as we would get by putting a man with good eyesight into the most total darkness, or, if we wish, into pure light, if that's what the super-perceptible world is; he who has no eyes cannot see either in pure light or pure darkness, like the blind man would see none of the treasures spread out before him), there is nothing left to consciousness but to cling to the phenomenon – that is, to consider true what it knows to be false – or to fill this emptiness with chimeras, which are always at least better than nothing...*

But the Interiority, or the super-perceptible beyond, has been born; it arises from the phenomenon, and the phenomenon is its mediation. Better yet, the phenomenon is its essence, and in fact is its filling-out. The super-perceptible is the perceptible and the perceived presented as they are in reality; but the reality of the perceptible and the perceived is that they are phenomena. That's why the super-perceptible is the phenomenon as a phenomenon. If one were to understand by this that the super- perceptible is consequently the perceptible world, or the world as it is for immediate perceptual certitude and for perception, one would understand it upside-down; because the phenomenon is not the world of perceptible knowledge and perception as being-there, but rather it is the perceptible knowledge and perception presented as transcended and presented in their truth as interiorities. One might have thought that the super- perceptible was not the phenomenon, but that's just because when using the word phenomenon what was understood was not really the phenomenon itself, but rather the perceptible world itself, as real effective reality (which, it should be mentioned in passing, does not exist in-and-for-itself, nor absolutely, and is thus not a truly existing thing.)

The commodity, contrary to the most ancient metaphysics, positively affirms the vacuity of the Interiority, and even its own non-existence. It decrees that everything stops at the phenomenon; such an absolutism of pure phenomena also denies the phenomenality of the phenomenon. But as soon as this negation of the phenomenality of the phenomenon reveals itself to be a phenomenon, the phenomenon rediscovers itself as a phenomenon once more – which denounces this negation as a lie – and this phenomenality, as a phenomenon, is already supersumed into

the super-perceptible, and this lying negation appears also as the metaphysical property of the commodity. In sum, insofar as the commodity presents itself as a pure phenomenon, its Interiority, its super-perceptible reality, becomes like something external to it. And this separation of the sacred and the profane, though muddled together – this split in the middle of the unity of the World as a totality, as Metaphysical – is itself still metaphysical, is itself a figure of metaphysics – in the same way as the split in Publicity was a figure of Publicity.

2. *Those who have been able to read this far will here see an explanation of the third remark on thesis 11. Science is not the always-smooth unraveling of a white thread, or otherwise of an Ariadne's thread, full of knots. On the contrary, Science revisits itself and backtracks and crosses over own path ceaselessly in the labyrinth of figures where meaning is in its element. And so, unswervingly, the blank returns, very soon gratuitously, to conclude, certain now, that nothing is beyond it, and authenticate the silence –*

The phenomenon as phenomenon is the super-perceptible; the fact of its appearing itself does not appear. Critical Metaphysics can reveal that appearing is, and that that constitutes a mystery. It can also show how this mystery manifests itself, in the era of the Spectacle: It manifests itself as something not manifesting itself as a mystery. But Critical Metaphysics cannot, and does not wish to destroy this mystery. We will leave that Sisyphean dedication to such absurd tasks to the Spectacle.

3. *More specifically: the existence of this mystery can be rendered public, contrary to the mystery itself, which is common but could obviously not itself be public. Here the difference between Publicity and the Common intervenes (a difference which Voyer lewdly confuses, for the sake of Publicis and Euro-RSCG). The Common is that which is given to us in sharing, and Publicity is the conscious practice of that sharing, which knows what it owes to the Common: that it is its necessary alienation. Thus it also consciously shares in the radical impossibility of sharing. The Common is that which makes the public expression that comprises Publicity possible, but this possibility itself does not let itself be expressed. The Common peeks out from the surface even of Publicity, but by unveiling itself it veils itself, and veils its unveiling. What is the most consubstantial with us and the closest to us, is also the furthest away from us, what we have the least a grasp of. And that is the absolute paradox. We have in common to be in the world, to speak, to be mortal, but we cannot say what being-in-the-world, language, or death really are at bottom. The Common can however erupt into Publicity, in the form of individual or collective experiences, which are always experiences of the inexpressible. The presence of the Common is none other than the presence of the transcendent.*



“The Common can however erupt into Publicity, in the form of individual or collective experiences, which are always experiences of the inexpressible. The presence of the Common is none other than the presence of the transcendent.”

42.

But this mode of disclosure which discloses itself as a *figure* also reveals the Spectacle as a *figure of Being*, or as a figure of metaphysics, or, rather, as the *commodity revealing itself to be a figure of Being and a figure of metaphysics*.

Remarks

1. *It is the ultimately metaphysical and ontological nature of the concept of the Spectacle that impelled Debord to give so many different definitions for what the Spectacle is, without which it would have been hard to see how they can all agree and unite into an organic whole. Debord, like the majority of revolutionary theoreticians up to now, did not want or was unable to acknowledge that he was operating on metaphysical terrain so as to critique commodity metaphysics. And nevertheless it is precisely this fact and its necessity that Critical Metaphysics reveals.*
2. *The metaphysical character of the Spectacle concept also appears in what unites the object revealed and the mode of its disclosure. Any anti-metaphysical interpretations of that concept, by separating out these two moments, condemn themselves to impoverishing the critique of the Spectacle by reducing it to merely a critique of the media. In effect, such interpretations, by considering the mode of disclosure in an isolated manner, are quite naturally led to seek it out in an isolable social object, and thus to hypostatize it, most generally in a particular sector of production. Moreover, this — in general vulgarly materialist — perspective, is quite content that the media can then be reduced to a simple material structure; but in so doing it also contradicts all modes of disclosure: according to said perspective there are nothing but things, some of which are rather good (good unchaptalized wine, immaculate artisanal works, and good friends), and others rather bad (television, computers, and Coca-Cola). Once it has circumscribed the Spectacle as some big external object, it can play the “well, that’s shit but I have an authentic life” card and go back to sleepy-headed comfort, as if having flashed some certificate of anti-spectacular purity. Such an attitude naturally leads one to fetishize the true “concrete little things,” the “real people,” that concretely wear them out, and the oh-so-very authentic concrete little plots of soil they ever so truly cultivate — the summit of the Spectacle’s insolence, eternally trying to sell us what it’s already destroyed! O, but where’ve PEOPLE put the snows of yester-year?*

By insisting on leaving out the effectiveness of the mode of disclosure, this pseudo-critique of the Spectacle only speaks the language of the Spectacle — even in spite of itself.

The critique of the Spectacle is either metaphysical or not a critique at all. And it must be explicitly metaphysical, or else it will turn against itself and reinforce the Spectacle.

43.

“The spirit of nature is a hidden one; it does not manifest itself in the form of a spirit: it is only a spirit for minds that know it, and it is spirit in itself, but not for itself.” (Hegel). The commodity is the spirit that alienates itself in an oppressive nature, the dead spirit victorious. Critical Metaphysics is the mind that knows the spirit of this shoddy nature, the *being-for-itself* of that spirit. Critical Metaphysics is the *manifestation of commodity metaphysics as metaphysics*, the *neglegentiae mihi videtur si non studemos quod credimus intelligere* – “it would be in my eyes negligent of us not to study thoroughly the things we think we understand” – inscribed in the pure commodity presence itself. Up to the present time, the world has done our thinking for us.

Remarks

1. *And so, contrary to popular opinion, we affirm that humanity has historically gone from social alienation to natural alienation, and not the other way around. And in spite of what certain economists may believe, the naturalness of the commodity is in no way a justification for its existence, and even less, indeed, a proof of its “eternal” nature. Humanity that alienates itself in nature does not correspond to its concept, and reality as nature is a reality that’s been fooled. Critical Metaphysics reveals this error of reality as the reality of error.*
2. *It is because nature is still a spirit that one can say, as we have (see our remark on thesis 27), that things communicate. Let us make ourselves clear: indeed, this spirit is still the spirit of men, but when mankind fails to grasp and know itself, when spirit is not for-itself, its being-for-itself separates from its being-in-itself, and that is also the autonomization of spirit; this is the effective power of things.*

44.

Critical Metaphysics applies even to being-there: every one of the fragments of this world is a confession of its falsehood.

45.

The historical development of the commodity mode of disclosure has brought mankind to such degree of bloomitude that we know it and *are* it. But only a man can make a Bloom. Alienation is always alienation from something. And so, the Bloom that discovers himself to be a Bloom, who is conscious of his Bloom state, has already qualitatively become something other than a simple Bloom. Because what peeks out from under the surface then and reveals itself is once again the layer of being which comprises the experience of the commodity being, and consequently the foundation and its transcendence of the layer found underneath that of absolute equivalence. The Bloom who has the intelligence of his Bloom-being is thus a critical metaphysician.

Remarks

1. *It was indeed our intent to write “the Bloom who has the intelligence of his Bloom-being.” He who only has a simple consciousness or comprehension of it is not yet a critical metaphysician; he can become one, that is unless he prefers to sell himself out as a professional in the language of flattery...*
2. *Who hides behind the Bloom that hides behind whatever watch? The act of hiding himself as Bloom, and thus the potential consciousness of it, inscribes in the very heart of his being, in the very heart of his bloomitude, a critical metaphysician who doesn't know he is one (or does).*
Critical Metaphysics is in everyone's guts.

46.

But also, insofar as Critical Metaphysics is the manifestation of commodity metaphysics as metaphysics, its very movement itself pushes it towards its own abolition, towards its transcendence. The primary aim of Critical Metaphysics is to suppress itself. It's merely a question of giving it the means to do so.

Remark

In effect, because the movement of Critical Metaphysics is precisely the movement of expression, and thus also the movement of the negation of commodity metaphysics, the fact of its attaining to effectiveness is its means of destroying commodity metaphysics, and thus of its own suppression, its own transcendence.

47.

Science is now the movement of Critical Metaphysics' disclosure. On its path towards self-suppression, Critical Metaphysics is science.

Remark

What we mean by "science" here is certainly not what the so-called scientists – whether they're on the payroll of the CNRS [French National Center for Scientific Research] or of the laboratories of Biopower and Co. – and other positivists imagine science to be, but, obviously, the practical movement of the self-expression of the Spirit.

(to be continued)

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