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The Organic Composition of Big Mama

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Abstract:

A century and a half after Marx's *Capital*, a synthetic idea of post-revolutionary society remains to be completed. We note a disconnect between Marx's brilliant dialectical analysis of the commodity and the prophesized post-revolutionary world where people are once and for all free of domination. Unlike Marx's analysis of the commodity, his vision of communism is untenable because it lacks an adequate social ontology and rational conceptual structure: in short, it represents what can best be described of as an *atopia*. We detect what amounts to an Oedipal fantasy in the theory of communist association in which the famous general intellect is taken back from Father Capital such that liberated subjects enjoy the immediacy of perverse enjoyments offered up by the repossessed means of survival, the new Machine Mother that hums along in the background. Lost are the mediating particularities of callings and specializations necessary for life in a modern world. Primitivism, anarchism, and neoliberalism exhibit a similar atopic structure, in which callings and even jobs are negated, while the latter embodies a new transcendental logic that can be summarized as an X — anti-X — non-X dialectic. We point to an augmented Marxist political imaginary that incorporates mediating structures of particularity and higher sublations of labour and social enjoyment.

Keywords: Marxism, general intellect, communism, revolution, atopia

Our argument represents an extension of an earlier piece (“Atopia Awaits”) published by the journal *Critical Sociology*.¹ In “Atopia” we surveyed the contradictions of Marx’s theory of communist association and found a disconnect between, on the one hand, Marx’s brilliant dialectical analysis of the commodity, and, on the other, the prophesized post-revolutionary world where people are once and for all free of domination. In short, the presuppositions that Marx relied upon to construct a vision of communism are untenable because, in the final analysis, they rest upon a social ontology that lacks a rational conceptual structure. Here, we will explore Marx’s dialectical analysis of the commodity in *Capital*, which we feel is a model of analytical perfection, and how it should ultimately provide a preparation for communist reconstruction. However, where the social ontology of communism should involve a reconstruction of the analytic judgments dissected in *Capital*, we find on the one hand, an implied assumption that communism in practice would be the actual result of this deconstruction, i.e., the final link in the chain of negation delivers freedom. On the other hand, the interesting but unwarranted addition of the *Resultate* to the English language version widely used today actually restores the commodity to its place of power in the form of a deposit of the total network of capital. In other words, *Capital* delivers too little (anarchy) and too much (the restoration of commodity hegemony) when we read it in terms of its political implications.

The picture of communism we are left with in the anarchic rendition is a happy-go-lucky world lacking a universal and obligatory normative dimension and where social authority is downshifted into a mechanized *uber*-intellect and limitless indulgence on the part of liberated subjects. Spirit — the famous ‘general intellect’ — is crystallized in the totality of the means of production and is reduced to a Big Machine operating in the background and automatically satisfying our material (maternal) needs leaving nothing but play time for the masses lollygagging in the shadow of Big Rock Candy Mountains. The most plausible model that we find accurately reflects Marx’s communist future is one where the monstrous bourgeois father, literally portrayed here and there in Marx’s writings as an all-devouring and unregulated vampire or werewolf, etc., is eliminated, opening a field of limitless pleasure for the liberated individual under the wing of the hyper-indulgent mechanized mother. Essentially, Marx’s image of post-revolutionary society

corresponds with remarkable precision to an Oedipal phantasy of unrestricted access to mother's goodies while forever avoiding neurotic renunciation.

All of this is part of the work that has gone on at the Symposium for New Directions in Critical Social Theory over the last decade at Iowa State University. "Atopia" marked what appears to be a turning point in the fate of the Symposium, partially reflected in the reactions to that piece.² Dreamers and robotics enthusiasts committed to Marx's jolly imagery of post-capital conviviality and creative play view the spectre of atopia as a wrong-headed break from neo-Marxist traditions. We see this break as an opportunity to deepen the social ontology and strengthen the critical powers of Marxian theory by incorporating work hitherto neglected. We feel that the way forward is to sublimate the theoretical 'perversions,' in the technical Lacanian meaning of the term, of Marxism with the 'neurotic' currents of classical sociology, especially Durkheim (panic ensues). The resulting *Marxheimian* sociology (a sublation of Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, Mauss, Freud, Weber, Lacan, among others) is nothing other than a reorienting of the field from the perverse drive for *immediate* enjoyment that permeates heterodox Marxist theories to one that is conceptually structured such that the infinite chain of analytically-derived judgments are sublated into a rational conceptual framework. Further, what we are calling Marxheimian sociology maintains a theoretical space for genuinely democratic authority operating in place of domination, fetishes, ideologies, dogmas, and rationalizations. This problem of *authority* is essential and makes us suspect in the eyes of some critical theorists.

Social Ontology and Authority

In our drive to critique and destroy authoritarianism we have, perhaps, gone too far and also delegitimized the concept of authority itself, which, might sound like a good idea to the garden variety critic, however, when we say things like 'down with authority' we are literally also saying 'down with ourselves.' Authority is the contemporary sociological concept for any form of moral surplus generated by human association that is crystallized into the form of a should or a must. The substance of authority is generated by human association and is known, variably, as collective effervescence, *ekstasis*, ritual frenzy, etc. The crystallizations of this immaterial substance, by whatever name you want to call it, has taken myriad forms throughout history: *Ka*, *Logos*, *Wakan*, *Orenda*, *Mana*, *Ruach*, Grace, Charisma, Prestige, Value, and thousands of other names.³ To be anti-authority *per se* is to be

anti-nomos, anti-social, and even anti-human. Marx aimed at a world without exchange-value but this value is only one aspect of the domain of Values.⁴ While we all aim for a world where the production for needs-satisfaction replaces production for exchange and the realization of surplus value, we cannot be humans without values in the broadest sense. The dissection of value, if it knows no limits, winds up devaluing humanity down to the bare existence of the biological real. For sure, we need a critique of Things like commodities and gods as reified and alien representations of our relations but at the end of the day we need not eject the symbol totally but to bring enigmatic Things 'down to earth' to reveal that, ultimately, they are only us in our external transfigured forms. The goal of critical theory should not be the further *devaluation* (capital does this superbly as the precondition for valorization) but the translation of mysterious Things into transparent and rational objects. We need to aim for the restoration of the concept, in other words.

Marx believed that we always already have within us as individuals the capacity for self-regulation and that if the slave was rid of the master an instinctual equilibrium would inevitably be restored to human affairs. But what if we have no instincts? What if our human nature is to acquire a second nature? What if we are unable to self-regulate, but, on the contrary, require particular others (the "particular equivalent") to ground our universality? For 50,000 years the moments when absolutes suffer declination are rare and always linked to huge civilizational catastrophes, e.g., the Thera volcanic event that ended the Mediterranean Bronze Age.⁵ In short, there is no humanity in the absence of some moral surplus of one kind or another and while at one point the Universal Equivalent that regulated archaic trade may have been one that came and went with each passing transaction⁶ it was nonetheless backgrounded by constellations of other obdurate values and norms. Nothing will prevent objects from becoming Things and objectivities from becoming delusions in the absence of authority. This was one of the points Engels attempted to make contra anarchism.⁷ Revolution was another name for authority: the authority of workers, freedom, and reason over the domination of the bourgeois class of monstrous exploiters. Anarchy belongs to the side of capital. But in Marx's political writings, 'authority' is on the side of the ruling class.

Bourgeois authority and the authority of the commodity form relies on fetishism. Authority may be grasped in as simple or as complicated terms as we wish but the fetishism of authority is always a many-splendored rainbow of reactions from a social dominance orientation, authoritarianism, rebelliousness, destructiveness, ethnocentrism, and so on.⁸ Smith says that "I would argue that authority fetishism is

the secret truth of many forms of authority.”⁹ But not all forms of authority rest on fetishism. Even in contemporary bourgeois democracy, which seems to be no democracy at all, authority still nonetheless flows from the ‘bottom up.’ The power of tyrants rests on the active or passive consent of the tyrannized. As Etienne de la Boetie famously said, the worst tyrants really have no power over us if we decide we no longer want to subject ourselves to their abuses; if they cut our throats it is only we ourselves cutting our own throats.¹⁰ If the United States is today besieged by oligarchs both domestic and foreign, and the line is increasingly blurred, it is because we the people have allowed it. So long as we have not fallen wholly and purely into the cells of alienation there is still authority and a process of delegation.¹¹ At the end of the day, and to the extent that we have not fallen into pure slavery where we are bound by physical chains, there is authority and authority resides in the seemingly powerless masses of little men.¹²

Authority is anti-domination, pure and simple. This has for the most part been lost on critical social theory and the relentless drive for negation and the rational war on authoritarianism; but infinite negation, down to the bone, leaves nothing in its place but a struggle to the death or bureaucratic and totalitarian intervention. Theory should make you bleed but theory should also provide the intellectual first aid as well as the long term care necessary for convalescence in a new, rational world. Infinite negation, negation to the last degree, is woven into the dialectical method and we can find it brilliantly deployed in Marx’s dissection of the commodity and the capitalist valorization process as the necessary preparation for the opening of a new world.

Surplus Psyche, or, Mike ‘The Perv’ Pence

In *Capital*, Marx dissects the commodity into its material and spiritual halves: the concrete object of utility and sublime bearer of value. Through the pages of *Capital* the capitalist syllogism is unwound into its base judgments and its ideological presuppositions are defetishized. *Capital*’s negative dialectic ends in a delta of a total devaluation, in which analytic dissection separates and reduces capital’s constituent elements into a pile of shards. Marx’s analysis of capital’s bad syllogistic structure does not conclude with a synthetic reconstruction or re-solution into a new syllogism, a new particularity, but terminates in evacuation of all particularity, leaving behind an immediate relationship of singularity to universality. One should not look to the artificially grafted *Resultate* for a conclusion. One has to look outside of *Capital*, in the oft-discussed “Fragment on Machines” in the *Grundrisse* for a moment of

synthetic reconstruction where Marx points to the reappropriation of the alienated social brain warehoused within the means of production. The bourgeoisie sucked all our brains out and transferred all our knowledge into the machinery and we will have it all back after the inevitable Revolution. We do not have to be smart when we have the great social brain operating in the background doing the thinking while we engage in endless loafing and play. The general intellect is like an omnipresent Mecha-Mother watching over us (the etymology of 'machine' can be tracked all the way back to equilibrium and equality and the connection to mother right and the equality of all offspring is striking). This is no longer a world of human values but one of incestuous enjoyment; the Big Mother exists to pleasure the subject (the pervert).

At the level of the individual, the three psychic structures (psychosis, perversion, neurosis) are mutually exclusive categories in Lacanian analysis. They categories hinge on the peculiar form of negation.

The Psychotic: There is no Big Other / foreclosure;

The Pervert: The Big Other exists to pleasure the subject / fetishistic disavowal;

The Neurotic: The subject exists to pleasure the Big Other / repression.¹³

A patient can manifest one and only one psychic structure that is *either* psychotic, perverse, or neurotic. Correctly identifying the operative psychic structure is crucial for a Lacanian analyst, for this structure profoundly determines the proper treatment protocol. At the level of society, however, social structures frequently assume compound forms resulting in blended social psychology, such as egoistic-altruism or anomic-egoism.¹⁴ The either/or of individual psychic structure assumes the both/and at the level of social psychology: neurotics as normal subjects in capitalist society also perverts.

The three psychic structures are differentiated by their relationship to the Big Other. The psychotic enmeshment in an immediate but ontologically fragile imaginary (m)other blocks awareness that at the symbolic level, there is no Big Other to particularize subjects and invest them with symbolic authority. The pervert is separated from the (m)other but disavows the Big Other's authority, evading alienation in a particularizing, constraining symbolic order. Here we are reminded of liquid tramp mobility in Big Rock Candy Mountains where hoboes freely wander from whisky lakes to cigarette trees and so on. The lyrics to Harry McClintock's bluegrass classic, "The Big Rock Candy Mountains" correspond to the post-work atopic, fantasy space sketched by Marx's 1844 writings. A wandering tramp enters a hobo camp

seeking the Big Rock Candy Mountains, a fantastic destination “where you sleep all day” because “they hung the Turk that invented work.” One can still consume because production of commodities occurs automatically, magically, without the need for labour. “Handouts grow on bushes,” cigarettes grow on trees, lemonade flows from springs, “hens lay soft-boiled eggs,” and “little streams of alcohol come trickling down the rocks.” Unlimited consumption unites with play as “there’s a lake of stew and of whiskey too you can paddle all around it in a big canoe.” This is Pervertland. The neurotic, by contrast, has traversed the full sequence of particularizing symbolic castration: they have separated from the primal mother and alienated in a castrating structure that compensates the subject with a symbolic phallus. Finally, psychotics enjoy a search for a symbolic phallus, a particular position to which they have been ‘called’ by the Big Other, a ratified position that enables the subject to be recognized by the Big Other as a fulfillment of the Big Other’s desire. The neurotic is animated by the ultimate answer to the enigmatic question: what does the Big Other want of me?

Perhaps we can venture a moment of ‘lay interpretation’ in regard to U.S. vice president Mike Pence, whose somewhat bizarre relationship to women is technically perverse. His wife is conflated with “Mother,” and like Norman Bates’ mother-child relationship in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, this dyadic bond is unlimited, immediate, and total. Pence enjoys unrestricted access to Mother’s goodies, a mother who is not simply the bourgeois ‘one and only’ but all women as such, enviously forbidding any other woman from slipping into the position of enjoyment (at meetings or dinner). Both psychotics and perverts lack the moment of particularity: they abide outside of the symbolic order. Social structures remain imaginary, fetishized ‘picture thoughts’ in Hegel’s sense: the pervert because of unrestricted and unlimited enjoyment and the psychotic because of the fear of immediate access to the universal. Pence can be compared to the protagonist in Thomas Mann’s novel, *The Holy Sinner*, which presents us with a redoubling of the Oedipal story. In *Sinner*, the symbolic order is ripped to shreds by double-distilled incest: a mother gives birth to her brother’s son whom she later (unwittingly) takes as her husband. We arrive at a collapse and derangement of the hinge of particularity in the family relationship: the mother/wife/aunt is married to her husband/son/nephew begot by his father/uncle. Revelation of these acts of sacrilege disqualifies the son from all structural positions. Barred from his perverse demand to enjoy, he becomes an ‘atopic’ man without earthly position, overwhelmed by meta-anxiety so intense that he seeks to hasten his

journey to his only certain-sure place in hell by chaining himself to a rock in the sea. The protagonist in *Sinner* repents of his perversion and seeks neurotic redemption.

Marx represents the 'pervert' side of Hegelianism: his post-revolutionary subjects are closer to Pence than the man who repents. Marx subjects the particularizing division of labour and capital's universal authority to "bind or loose" individual souls to positions of labour where surplus labour is sucked out of them, to unrelenting dialectical analysis. The actualization of Marx's negation of capital's bad syllogism — revolution — cancels its alienating authority to affix workers to exploitative labour positions while wiping out the particularizing division of labour. Marx's identification of particularization and mediation with alienation is a particularly perverse move. Institutional particularization transforms individuals from beings of immediate enjoyment into subjects of desire (especially desire for the desire of the Other and the desire to be recognized by the Other who only recognizes subjects who are in a definite position, occupying certain coordinates within the social system, and exercising the authority of their symbolic phallus).

At the end of Fromm's *Concept of Man* we find a quoted Marx imbued with an intense desire for unceasing struggle which is precisely the model of the permanent revolution, the ongoing negation without end, where there is no need to reconstruct anything because their primary focus is the prevention of the return of the Big Other who would bar the unrestricted pleasures that await. The permanent revolution (paranoia as a perpetual state of mind) guarantees unceasing mortal combat as the means or path to perverse enjoyment. To recapitulate: in Marxism the Big Other is split into the Big Father and the Big Mother with the former being ejected from the collective fantasy space leaving only the Big Mother, augmented, however, with the repossessed Social Brain sunk into the massified and automated means of production. What was formerly the organic composition of capital emerges in the post-revolutionary era as the organically composed Machine-Mother, the communist Big Mama. Isn't it interesting that feminism has been generally resistant to Marxism and the communist revolutionary program?

Tramps: Capital's Light Infantry

Displacement from particularized positions untethers subjects from mediating social structures. They become refugees (those who "flee" or "fly"), hobos, tramps, or nomads. Marx addresses tramping workers in the section of *Capital* entitled "The Nomadic Population," depicting dispossessed agricultural workers forced to wander

in search of industrial employment. Marx described these nomads as the “light infantry of capital” camping around factories and other employment hotspots.¹⁵ Nomads were forced to maximize the “price they pay for their wages” by living in improvised villages of “wooden huts” that “lack all sanitary arrangements” but allowed capitalists to exploit “workers in two directions at once -- as soldiers of industry, and as tenants.”¹⁶ Workers were reduced to “troglodytes” living in small caves dug along the banks near the factories where they were treated worse than livestock: “Fat oxen! Starving men!”¹⁷ Stripping peasants and their ugly huts from the land, shoving them into out-of-sight, “open-village” slums, created “show villages” of clean, neat cottages set among large, well-tended fields.¹⁸ The positivity of these beautiful village scenes was predicated on the hidden negativity of exploited and impoverished labour. Show villages could appear as feathers in the cap of the British pastoral only if masses of ostrich carcasses were buried among the huts and caves of nearby camps. Marx viewed demoralized life among displaced workers in the “tramping gang” as a demonic double of Fourier’s utopian system. Where Fourier thought young workers would enjoy dirty play, “gipsy fun,” and promiscuous sexual life, the tramping gang forced children into brutalizing dirty work that exposed them to sexual exploitation.¹⁹ Marx relates that owners of depopulated rural estates and show villages occasionally expressed guilt for displacing workers:

It is a melancholy thing to stand alone in one’s country ... I look around and not a house is to be seen but mine. I am the giant of Giant Castle, and have eat up all my neighbors.²⁰

We concur with Marx’s conclusion, that the “cleanly weeded land and the unclean human weeds ... are pole and counterpole of capitalist production.”²¹

The Negation of the Calling

Industrial capital pumps surplus value out of human subjects primarily through the social form of the wage-labour job.²² During the era of the Protestant Reformation, capitalism particularized economic subjects into specialized, this-worldly callings (*vocatio*) rather than wage-labour jobs. Believers were driven into callings with special force under the economic theology of Calvinism.²³ In this theological system, the workaday world was God-forsaken, drained of the sacred pure’s immanent grace, and abandoned to the demonic forces of sacred impurity. Abandoned by God,

believers desired signs of their fate in the afterlife (underserved and predestined election for salvation) as well as protection from evil forces swirling about them. The social form that met both of these needs was the calling, a particularized occupation pursued with ethical seriousness and moral conviction. By pouring energy and activity into a calling, the believer could discern signs of salvation from a transcendent god in the form of profit while fending off ever-present demonic threats. The calling functioned as a magic circle equipping early capitalists with the power to divine fate while protecting them from sin and resident evil.

Durkheim recognized the positivity of particularization and incorporated self-determined vocations into his synthetic idea of modern society,²⁴ as did contemporaries such as Mark Twain, for whom intellectual work within the vocation was a form of paradise.²⁵ Weber's defense of bourgeois culture is grounded in the affirmation of the meaningful redemption of time through self-chosen, self-managed, self-determined specialization. His tragic view of culture that grows while the individual's share in the totality shrinks can only be overcome through particularizing vocations and participation in self-chosen circles of affiliation. The calling is the middle term between individual psyche and universal Spirit. Either we relate to each other productively or we are in a living hell.

Indications of atopia abound in neoliberal capitalism, especially in the U.S., where globalization, deindustrialization, and automation have hit especially hard, a perfect storm, that swept away careers and wage-labour jobs leaving behind temporary, part-time, and precarious employment. Jobs in the U.S. are no longer callings but mere gigs (the gig economy) or sharing (the sharing economy), coordinated with smartphone apps like Taskrabbit, Thumbtack, Postmates, Handy, Dogvacay, Uber, Lyft, Airbnb.²⁶ These changes shift the weight of social life so that morally-significant activity is no longer constrained within capitalist vocations, careers, or even jobs, but spreads to avocations and para-vocations.

The "Prosperity Gospel" of health and wealth has emerged as a prominent economic theology of neoliberalism. A branch of the "word of faith" Holiness movement, the prosperity gospel encourages believers to seek wealth and relief from gout, high blood pressure, and diabetes through the magical powers of Jesus rather than through hard work in a waged or salaried job with decent health insurance. Jesus rewards believers who quit their day jobs, or at least start a side business that enables a flow of unearned but morally deserved cash. These dollar-disciples are rewarded for their faith with blessings out of all proportion to effort and work. Those greenback martyrs who stay within the traditional framework of wage-

labour jobs are disqualified from the outpouring of blessings from the sublime Fanatic of Finance. This partially explains the rise of avocational, side-gigs (network marketing, eBay businesses, stock market day trading, real estate flipping) among believers enroute to a this-worldly paradise of remunerative retirement. The prosperity gospel is anti-Calvinism that negates the calling: hard work and ascetic conduct disqualify the believer and prove damnation rather than redemption. Trust not in the calling, but in Jesus, the god of gigs and one-click deliverance, to receive blessed wealth without work.

In the U.S., neoliberal capitalism has reduced the percentage of household income derived from wage-labour jobs, salaried careers, and professional callings. In 2012, half of U.S. households received transfer payments from government in excess of tax payments and a fifth received means-tested public assistance (including SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and housing assistance).²⁷ Additionally, roughly fifty million households receive social security retirement payments, Medicare, and/or food stamps while more than eighty million individuals receive Medicaid. The average household in the lowest quintile receives 39% of its income from government transfers, the second quintile receives 37%, while the middle quintile receives 27%.²⁸ Even in the U.S., notorious for its ungenerous, porous social welfare system, a significant portion of household income derives from non-work sources. Further decoupling livelihood from specialized work are retirement accounts, especially defined-contribution plans, that tie household well-being to universal markets rather than the particular jobs.

From “X” to “Non-X” via the “Anti-X”

This is a good time to reveal what we might refer to as the transcendental logic of neoliberalism: the X – anti-X – non-X dialectic whereby monetary wealth is transferred from the bottom to the top and symbolic capital proliferates (devaluation) and redistributed from the top to the bottom. We find this everywhere in society but perhaps no place better than the case of Pee Wee Professors in the synergized American university.²⁹ In higher education, new Ph.D.'s face bleak job prospects, unable to find tenured faculty positions, while courses taught by non-professors grow exponentially. At many universities students complete degrees by taking courses from anyone but a tenured professor with a lifetime dedication to scholarship and higher education. The ranks of non-professors have expanded for budgetary reasons as lecturers, adjuncts, and instructors can be hired for a fraction of the cost of

tenured faculty member. In a well-meaning effort to symbolically honor long-term but non-professor colleagues, universities bisect material and immaterial components of the position. Tenured professor's salaries and benefits are ransacked and reapportioned for administrative budgets while the symbolic prestige (the status wage or what Weber would call the 'premium') is spread around along a flattened ontic plane to the paraprofessional non-professors by granting professor titles to any who teach courses and perform other professorly duties. At one university, a plan is underway to create twelve new professor titles for non-tenured amateurs, outsiders, and paraprofessionals: teaching professors, research professors, clinical professors, adjunct professors, each with assistant, associate and full designations. The signifier "professor" must be preserved, however, while its traditional, signified content is jettisoned with the signifier bound to a new concept: the "non-professor." The route from professor (X) to non-professor (non-X) runs through the actual anti-professor (anti-X).³⁰

Neoliberal politics are driven by this unique transcendental logic; the marginal charismatic claims of outsiders whose qualifications for office are their lack of experience and expertise. Examine the role of amateurs and hacks in government. What was odious under the Bush regime has become comical under the Trump Monster. The perfect candidate is militantly disqualified. Take for example Scott Pruitt (anti-X) as the choice to run the EPA (X). Pruitt's qualification is that he hates the sun and the wind (and probably the stars, too) and is installed as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency to ensure that it cannot function properly and to transfer wealth to dirty energy industrialists through deregulation. The EPA under Pruitt will become the Wealth Protection Agency through the efforts of an anti-environmentalist. Donald Trump, heir to real estate, sexual deviant, and alleged Russian money-launderer is the extreme version of this, and not only Pruitt but his entire administration reflects the charisma of the outsider that brought him to power. Professionals with expertise and lifelong dedication to their calling were dismissed, and cartoonish anti-professionals propped up in their place, e.g., an incurious oil executive as secretary of state; an uneducated and sadistic Christian heiress as secretary of education; a dim-witted former governor with an animal science degree in which he earned a "D" in his Meat Seminar as secretary of energy;³¹ a bubbly family wedding planner as head of the housing authority, and let us not forget Department of Homeland Security nominee, Sheriff David "Christmas" Clark, famous for a uniform festooned with a blizzard of decorations, ribbons, and bows picked up on the cheap after the film *Office Space* created a surfeit of gewgaws leftover from T.G.I Friday's.

Atopia and the Organic Composition of Big Mama

Technological innovation, the increasing organic composition of capital, has now reached a point of crisis: productivity increases are reducing necessary labour, displacing workers with automation hollowing out entire job categories. Automatic, self-driving vehicles (trucks, cars, drone aircraft) will cause an avalanche of displacement from driving-jobs, one of the largest job categories in the U.S., and one of the few sources of high-paying positions for uneducated workers. Human drivers will disappear, replaced by delivery drones, trucking drones, taxi drones, even warrior drones.³² Vehicles are a source of enjoyment as well as employment to white, working class men who form intense transference relationships with their Harley-Davidson motorcycles and pickup-trucks.³³ Ballads to trucks as safe-havens in a confused world of cheap whiskey and unfaithful women are a staple of “bro-country” music. In robot atopia, a twangy broken-hearted male vocalist will lament the loss of all his “purty-thangs that done run off without him:” his job, dog, best friend, and woman all spirited away by his autonomous Ford F150.

The gargantuan organic composition of capital displaces workers from mediating particularity, a top-for-tail situation in which professionals remain unemployed while non-professionals take their place. The dialectic of avocation and vocation among dispossessed workers is at the heart of Robert Frost's (1936) poem, “Two Tramps in Mud-Time.” The protagonist, taking a rejuvenating break from desk-work by engaging in some do-it-yourself wood-chopping, was interrupted by two tramping lumberjacks “not long since from the lumber camp” seeking work. Possessing a particular skill but lacking a job, the tramps wanted the poet to give up his pleasurable, but inexpert ax-work to create paid employment for them, since others have “no right to play with what was another man's work for gain.” The poet acknowledges that while his “right might be love” (spontaneous enjoyment of the work) the tramps’ “right was need, and where the two exist in twain, theirs was the better right, agreed.”

Frost's hobo lumberjacks and woodcutting poets evoke the out-of-joint callings of neoliberal capitalism. As particularizing work disappears, class-consciousness diminishes, transforming classes into masses.³⁴ Marxists hoped to redeploy dispossessed workers, “the light infantry of capital,” as revolutionary shock troops. However, throughout the 20th century, these “nomadic populations”

disastrously massed into reactionary formations behind authoritarian leaders promising perverse enjoyment of the Fatherland (father's land = mother). As neoliberal automation displaces droves of workers, an atopic mob of the dispossessed accumulates. It remains an open question whether these masses will be mobilized for revolution or authoritarian reaction. But even if the revolution occurs, and the Big Machine Mother is repossessed for perverse enjoyment, the problems of atopia, authority and mediation remain. One hundred and fifty years after Marx's *Capital*, a synthetic idea of post-revolutionary society remains to be completed. At the end of his poem, Frost evokes an image of new forms of labour where "work is play," where "love and need are one," and where work unites "my avocation and my vocation as my two eyes make one in sight." An adequate Marxist political imaginary must include just such mediating structures of particularity (e.g. a division of callings), so that higher syntheses of labour and enjoyment might be actualized the day after the revolution ends.

¹ Worrell and Krier 2015.

² Lotz 2016; Salerno 2016; Smith 2016.

³ Smith 1988.

⁴ Bouglé [1926] 1970; see also Bosanquet 1912; Goux 1990.

⁵ See the tremendously flawed but nonetheless flamboyant argument laid out by Jaynes 1990.

⁶ Marx [1867] 1976, p.183.

⁷ In Marx and Engels 1972, pp.662-65.

⁸ Smith 2016.

⁹ Smith 2016, p.22.

¹⁰ Boetie, [1552–53] 1975.

¹¹ Gierke, in Smith 2016, p.23.

¹² Reich 1970, 1974.

¹³ Fink 1997.

¹⁴ See the compound forms of self-destruction in Book 2, Chapter 6 of Durkheim's *Suicide* [1897] 1951, [1867]1976, p. 818. Marx's analysis here finds a 20th century echo in Agamben 1998, p. 166, who views "camps" as the hidden matrix of modern politics.

¹⁵ Marx [1867]1976, pp. 818-20.

¹⁶ Marx [1867]1976, p. 823

¹⁷ Marx [1867] 1976, p. 838.

¹⁸ Marx [1867] 1976, p. 852.

¹⁹ Marx [1867] 1976, p. 849.

²¹ Marx [1867] 1976, p. 853.

²² For a detailed review of Marx's account of wage-labour jobs as pumping and absorption stations, see Krier and Amidon 2017.

²³ Weber [1905]2002.

²⁴ Durkheim 1997[1893].

²⁵ Twain 1917, p. 208.

²⁶ See Heller (2017).

²⁷ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p70-141.pdf>.

²⁸ (<https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/51361-householdincomefedtaxes.pdf>)

²⁹ The reference here is to the film, "Pee Wee Herman's Big Adventure" in which Pee Wee lands a temporary gig as an outlaw biker by committing acts of petty destructiveness before the admiring gang while dancing in platform shoes to the song "Tequila." Having proven his qualifications, he was gifted a bike (chopper) to recover his own bike (unbeknownst to the gang, an actual bicycle) that he immediately crashes into a billboard, revealing to all that his biker calling was a ruse.

³⁰ Compare to the time-honored tradition of paying everyone in a bank starvation wages while granting them the title of "vice-president."

³¹ "As the *Washington Post* reported, professors have been ranked according to how profitable they were to the university. Previous reports suggested Perry wanted to treat students as "customers" and tie teacher bonuses to anonymous student evaluations. One reason that might explain [Perry's] hostility toward the system: he didn't do very well in it. A source in Texas passed to *The Huffington Post* Perry's transcripts from his years at Texas A&M University. The future politician did not distinguish himself much in the classroom. While he later became a student leader, he had to get out of academic probation to do so. He rarely earned anything above a C in his courses — earning a C in U.S. History, a D in Shakespeare, and a D in the principles of economics. Perry got a C in gym. Perry also did poorly in classes within his animal science major. In fall semester 1970, he received a D in veterinary anatomy, a F in a second course on organic chemistry and a C in animal breeding. He did get an A in world military systems and "Improv. of Learning" — his only two As while at A&M. 'A&M wasn't exactly Harvard on the Brazos River,' recalled a Perry classmate in an interview with *The Huffington Post*. 'This was not the brightest guy around. We always kind of laughed. He was always kind of a joke'" (Cherkis 2011: n.p.).

³² On warrior drones, see Coker (2013) and on the sociology of drone warfare see Worrell (2015).

³³ Krier and Swart 2016.

³⁴ On the collapse of classes into masses under National Socialism, see Neumann ([1944] 2009).

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