

# On the neglected emphasis on alienation in Marx's mature works

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# Outline

- Overview of the history of reading Marx
- Defining alienation
- Overview of the history of reading alienation in Marx
- Positive argument: Marx writes more about alienation from the 1860s onwards
- A note on why salvaging alienation is helpful for us today

# History

- The first argument in Marx interpretation began in Marx's lifetime: 1818 to 1883.
- There are two elements here:
  - 1) Communism is not Christianity
  - 2) The materialist conception of history is not deterministic

# Communism is not Christianity

- Marx's major comments here run from 1844 to 1848. They are anti-charity, anti-philanthropy, anti-union, anti-animal rights, and unambiguously anti-levelling.
- To gloss the general grumpiness here and focus on why Marx hated **charity**, this is simple. The rich steal from the poor and then pat themselves on the back for returning something—after they notice that they have stolen so much that the poor can no longer live. As Marx writes: 'Religious socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat.' 1844. After the abolition of poverty, charity makes no sense, and this is ultimately what Marx wants.
- You may say here but what about the suffering in the meantime? To which, Marx says: you're the one making it last ...

# Communism is not Christian

- As to anti-levelling, Marx thinks that the desire to ‘spread everything out equally’ is a product of envy, and is secretly about the destruction of culture and wealth.
- To quote: ‘Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy and levelling-down on the basis of a *preconceived* minimum. How little this abolition of private property represents a **genuine appropriation** is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it.’ Marx, 1844.

# Communism is not Christian

- Marx does not want everybody squatting in a ditch growing turnips. Culture is important to him. He wants operas, theatre, good wine and good food. He is in no way ascetic. In Communism, everybody works, and everybody plays. Subsistence for Marx is for animals.
- To quote once more: 'Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a socialist tinge.' Marx, 1848. Marx did not want these Christian ascetics reading him. Even before Marx was dead they already falsely linked the terms **Marxism** and **equality**, until Marx himself began to say: 'I am not a Marxist'.

# Communism is not deterministic

- This one gets harder, and it only really starts after Marx's death, though still in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This argument consists of Engels writing letters and articles against a new breed of Marx barstardisers—these the opposite of the red Christians who only hate capitalism because it is 'unfair'. (As we will see, it is **not for this reason** that Marx hates capitalism).
- The determinists are blunt people who think that **politics** is a waste of time, given that economic forces rule the day. They also don't care if millions die in order to rid the world of capitalism. These anti-liberal Marxists in the end (*qua* the Bolsheviks) win, and claim Marx as their prize.

# Communism is not deterministic

- There is an irony here, as Engels was in his day a champion of non-deterministic Communism, critiquing for example **Karl Barth** and accusing him of being 'extreme' in his understanding of historical materialism. The irony is that 50 years later, the ossified communist party used the works of Engels (*more than the works of Marx*) to create an orthodox version of historical materialism (*diamat* or dialectical materialism) that resembled the forms that Engels was critical of in his lifetime. But that is not the point here.

# Communism is not deterministic

- The point is that the second argument in Marx interpretation began very early.
- The first, Marx v the liberal/religious Marxists, began before Marx was dead.
- The second, Engels v the **hard** determinists, began when Marx was barely cold.
- So we shouldn't be shocked that the next 150 years to follow have had their own disagreements.

# Marx scholars v the Bolsheviks

It is often forgotten that the revolution that ended Russia's status as a Czarist state was not the Bolshevik revolution. Lenin was not there, having been earlier exiled. The revolution that toppled Nicholas II was ultimately a popular peasant revolution, and resembles many other revolutions that had toppled overreaching kings beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. Socialism was in no way an inevitable outcome of the initial, larger revolution, and in fact it took a **second** revolution for the Bolsheviks to seize power.

# Footnote

- Cornelius Castoriadis notes an irony: that the peasant revolution was in many way organically communist/democratic. Across Russia, in the void of power, peasants began self-managing production in various ways, for their own benefit.
- After the second revolution, the Bolsheviks came along and said, sorry comrades, you are not ready for this. One day, but not today. Today we are socialist, not yet communist. And that means: **bureaucracy**, not democracy. Your workplaces will be managed by administrators, who will answer to the party, who know your will better than you do ...

# The Bolsheviks v the Peasants

- Because the first revolution had not been a Bolshevik revolution, those who had fought the Czar and his forces weren't ready to have some new power begin to tell them what to do.
- The Bolsheviks won power in two ways. Firstly, the Provisional Government that was set up after the peasant uprising was weak. Like the Provisional Government that was set up after Louis XVI was toppled, it suffered from disunity, indecision, and lack of a common enemy. The Bolsheviks looked strong and decisive in comparison and gained a lot of popular support. Secondly, the Bolsheviks were, from the beginning, merciless.

# The Party

- It is basically tradition to say that Trotsky and Lenin were okay guys and **only Stalin** was a dictator, but I break tradition here. They were all dictators, and Trotsky was there, implementing with Lenin the centralised monstrosity that he soon regretted and attacked.

# Marx scholars v the Bolsheviks

- Back to the point. Engels was dead too by now, and the last Marx scholar with legitimate pedigree was Karl Kautsky, whom Engels had entrusted the project of finishing editing the final volumes of *Capital*. Karl Kautsky was a boring, vanilla, plodding reader of Marx. He read more Marx than anyone has before or since (having access to a lot of materialist that were never published). His reading was basic (and identical to Engels' reading). And his response to the **Bolsheviks** was, basically, that what they were doing had nothing to do with Marx, and that they had no understanding of Marx. Finally, he said that the Soviet Union was a disgrace, worse than capitalism.

# Lenin's revenge

- Lenin of course wasn't happy, and painted Kautsky as a 'renegade'.
- Personally, I think that Lenin understood Marx better than Kautsky did. But this is not the point.
- The point is that this is the third major phase of Marx interpretation/disagreement. Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg were both perhaps the first Marxists to say that Lenin was a dictator, that the Soviet Union was an outrage, and that Marx must be rolling in his grave.

# The Orthodoxy v everybody else ...

- By 1919, Marxism had ossified into a deterministic system. Kautsky had been silenced, and Engels was cited in support of a system of the kind that he had criticised in his own lifetime. As is being noted more and more today, Marx is barely present in this Marxism. Engels is more frequently used as a theoretical basis for *diamat*, for the reason that Engels was *more deterministic in outlook than Marx was*, and his works were more amenable to supporting orthodox Marxism.

# The problem

- The problem here was that young socialists were reading Marx and getting confused. György Lukács and Karl Korsch were the first party members (the first from within the movement, the first pro-socialist readers) to question (in print) the truthfulness of the party reading.
- They were silenced.

# What were the criticisms?

- Lukács suggested that 1) Marx and Engels might not be on the same page about everything and 2) that human activity might have a reciprocal influence on the economic laws of history that rule us, in that the world (and nature) is composed of congealed human activity.
- Grigory Zinoviev, a founding Bolshevik, shut this down publicly declaring that Lukács was still a liberal. Ironically, Lukács survived and later found a place in the party after being carefully watched for a long time. He publically repented in 1922, allowed his critical works to remain censored, and didn't repeat the subversive content until he was an old man. Zinoviev was executed in the purges of the 1930.

# Interpretive disagreements so far ...

- So far, we have:
- Marx hated **liberal socialists**, accused them of misreading him, and warned all that their communism would be a nightmare (1844 to 1848, where these criticisms drop off).
- Engels warned readers of Marx that Marx was not a **hard determinist** and published counter-articles against this reading (1880-1890s).
- Kautsky was horrified by the Bolsheviks, even before the first gulag was built (1910s).
- The Bolsheviks, now the Communist Party, soon to be the ruling party of the USSR, begin to punish people for reading Marx (1910-1920s).

# Then a break ...

- The Communist Party rules the USSR. Stalin dissolves *Comintern* in the 1940s, reducing public debate around the optimal content of communism. Fear keeps things quiet internally. Externally, the West thinks that the USSR is more stable than it is, and is not aware of how much **terror** is involved in keeping everybody in line. There are fanatics of course who love the system, and people in vocations like farming are in many cases objectively better off. But the consequences for **not loving** the system were dire.

# Then ...

- Early in the 1950s, Stalin dies. There is talk of 'de-Stalinsiaiton' in the Soviet Union, which means, in short, dialling down the terror. But this 'lesser' terror is still, relatively speaking, terrible ...
- 1956, there is a revolution in Hungary. It is brutally quashed with Soviet tanks.
- In 1968, several months after the Prague Spring and a few months after the first May Day in France, the Soviet Union (with some allies) invaded Czechoslovakia to counter 'liberalisation'.
- Both acts of war were horrific, and people who hate capitalism now have a reason to hate communism. One cannot even blame Stalin any more. The final disagreement that I want to speak about irrupts here. It is called the 'Humanist controversy'.

# The humanist controversy

- The humanist controversy is far from simple. But it can be made so for the purposes of this talk.
- Marxists all over the world who are horrified by Soviet brutality disassociate themselves from the USSR. It is a break up/divorce. There is a custody issue. Who gets little Marx?

# The two Marxes

Louis Althusser gets Marx from 1845 onwards, 'the mature Marx', and Erich Fromm gets Marx from 1844 and earlier, 'the young Marx'.

Humanist Marxists read early texts, and talk about Marx on freedom and alienation, gathered around Fromm.

Anti-humanist Marxists read late texts, and talk about Marx on dialectical materialism, gathered around Althusser.

Fromm demands that all people of good conscience must protest against the USSR. Althusser demands that we wait, saying, it's a bit rough what's happening, but the outcome will be peace ... Eventually. We must continue to keep our communist party memberships and support the USSR.

# The humanist controversy

- Keep in mind that the USSR still has 30 years to go.
- The humanist debate went on for most of that. The fall of the wall made it redundant (and for many, this made Marx redundant).
- But while it raged, it raged. Fromm clutched his copy of the *1844 Manuscripts* and said: Marx is about freedom! Althusser clutched *Capital*, and yelled, Marx is very clearly writing about history without a subject.

# Who won?

- For me, Althusser won, but only because anti-humanism went into vogue via Derrida, Lacan, and co. The cost has been that he has been greatly criticised. I try not to get too vitriolic about him.
- I can say with all certainty that *Marx* didn't win. And with this, a little late, I get to the point of my lecture. *Marx* didn't win because Althusser believed that he had a right to lie (he was, in his own words, on the side of 'history', on the side of the best possible cause), and he exercised this right passionately. And one of the lies really stuck (on all sides) in Marx scholarship. It is this:

# Althusser on Marx

- 'The whole, fashionable, theory of 'reification' depends on a projection of the theory of alienation found in the early texts ... on to the theory of 'fetishism' in *Capital* ... An ideology of reification that that sees 'things' everything in human relations confuses in this category 'thing' (a category more foreign to Marx cannot be imagined) very social relation, conceived, according to the model of a money-thing ideology.' 1963.

# From his glossary of terms:

- Alienation. An ideological concept used by Marx in his Early Works and regarded by the partisans of these works as the key concept of Marxism ... In his later works, however, the term appears very rarely, and where it does it is either used ironically, or with a different conceptual content.

This is a lie. It is not an 'alternate interpretation'. It is a (well intentioned, politically motivated) lie.

- And this lie leads us to the title of this paper. 'On the neglected emphasis on alienation in Marx's mature works.' My thesis is that Marx writes **the most** on alienation in *Capital* and other post-1960 works. Why is this thesis marginal?
- 1) 'Humanist' Marxists who are interested in alienation focus on early texts, where the term is still vague, and mixed up with a different, vaguer still concept, **estrangement**.
- 2) 'Anti-humanist Marxists' have been taught to 'read Marx' by Althusser, who tells them in advance that they will not find any mention of alienation in later works. Suitably trained, they do not find any mention of alienation there.

# But ...

- But alienation is there. It is everywhere. It would take me hours to read all that Marx wrote about alienation in the works post 1845 (precisely where Althusser tells us to stop looking for it).
- So I'll give you some of the best now from the works.

# Quotes from 1844

- 1844: the externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien.
- 1844: This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces—labour's product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour. Labour's realization is its objectification.

# Quotes from 1846

- 1846: The producer is therefore controlled by the product, the subject by the object, labour which is being realized by the labour realized in an object ... The relationship of labour to the conditions of labour is turned upside down, so that it is not the worker who makes use of the conditions of labour, but the conditions of labour make use of the worker ...
- 1846: ... therefore, as long as man remains in natural society ... as long ... as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, mans' own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him ... This fixation of social activity, the consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectation, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now.

# Quote from 1848

- 1848: In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer. In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present: in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality. And the abolition of this state of things is called by the bourgeois the abolition of individuality and freedom! And rightly so. The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.

# From *Capital*

- Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer.
- Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.
- Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labour-power.

## From *Capital* cont.

- These formulas, which bear the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite, appear to the “political economists” bourgeois consciousness to be as much a self-evident and nature-imposed necessity as productive labour itself ...
- This is 20 years after Althusser claims that Marx isn't talking about alienation any more. Althusser can't pretend that he doesn't understand what alienation is, because he demonstrates **clear understanding** in his 'arguments' about alienation **not being there** in the mature Marx.

# On the imagined right to lie

- Althusser, like Plato before him, lied ‘for the good of the people’. Plato lied in his war against democracy, because he thought that he knew best. Althusser lied too. But he didn’t know best. Plato at least was right, in that direct democracy **was dangerous** for Athens: in that the citizens decided on all questions of war. Althusser lied to protect a **brutal, totalitarian regime** that was falling out of favour. And the damage he did still lingers today, as **young radicals** follow Althusser’s recommendations and read the works of **dictators**, at the same time being unable to read **Marx** (if they have read *Reading Capital*, a textbook that makes reading *Capital impossible*).
- It is of course possible to read Marx and get it wrong. But for me, Althusser saw what was there in Marx and lied to protect the project of socialism.

# Who am I?

- You may ask on what authority I decide the content of the works of Marx: who is lying and who is telling the truth. It is fashionable today to say that there is no such thing as **truth and lie**: all readings are valid.
- But there are *political* and *philological* readings of Marx. Althusser and Fromm both read Marx *politically*, in attack and in defence of the USSR. For me, one must read Marx *philologically*. After one understands the actual content, then one can think about political applications. There is an actual content to what Marx wrote, and it is important.
- All readings are interpretations. But all interpretations are not equal.

# Defining alienation

- By now maybe you have a sense that perhaps what I'm talking about when I say alienation isn't what you thought alienation means. **Alienation isn't a feeling.** It's not about crying or being alone. It's not about the fact that what I make when I'm working for somebody else isn't mine (though this is a huge problem of capitalism).
- The definition of alienation is as clear as clear can be. **It means that the dead rule the living.** If you're going to write something down, write this. Alienation means that the dead rule the living. It means this from the start to the end. As Marx goes along, he writes more and more about this alienation, in clearer and clearer terms.

# However ...

- So, perhaps you're thinking now: what about when my jerk boss makes me stay late/over the weekend? I recently read about a poultry processing plant that make workers wear nappies to reduce bathroom breaks.
- Does this not sound like people dominating people? Isn't the problem people? Why is Marx talking about the dead? It aint no ghost making me wear a nappy!

# Alienation

- But it is a ghost making you wear a nappy. It is your own ghost: your own congealed activity that is facing you *as if* it is apart from you. And that ghost is up inside your boss, who is less free and human than you are. When Amanda Devine says that BLM activists pulled the trigger on Justine Damond, she is dead: she is pure capital, pure neoliberal apologetics, with no trace of humanity left. When Craig Kelly says that people will die because of renewable power, an earnest look on his face, in clear contraction to all evidence, he has become one with capital.

# Life does not live

- When Scomo brings coal into question time, it is the same. When Turnbull insists, despite his own common sense and intelligence, that big business will pass the money down to you if we first let him pass our money up to them, he is pure capital. These people are agents of capital and not people. They are traitors to the living. They want what is best for capital, and care nothing about us, the living. And in the **short term**, capital gives them a small reward for their treachery. They don't have to wear nappies or wash dishes. Capital pats them on the head and they enjoy their service (if they can block out the guilt).

# In case you think I'm stretching this too far!

- In *Capital*: 'The capitalist functions only as *personified* capital, capital as a person, just as the worker is no more than *labour* personified. That labour is for him just effort and torment, whereas it belongs to the capitalist as a substance that creates and increases wealth, and in fact it is an element of capital, incorporated into it in the production process as its living, variable component ...'
- In *The Holy Family*: 'The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-alienation. But the former class finds in this self-alienation its confirmation and its good, its own power; it has in it a semblance of human existence.'

# Caveat.

- I am unable to provide proof tonight that there is more written on alienation in Marx after 1860 than before, more mentions and better elucidations. But before you go out and count the times that the word 'alienation' appears in different texts, a caution. Firstly, there are two German words that translate into two terms: alienation (*Entäusserung*) and estrangement (*Entfremdung*). Marx himself didn't have set conventions for these terms in the beginning, and translators do different things with them. Althusser practiced sleight of hand here, talking about the most confusing elements of **estrangement** (which Marx calls a misalignment of essence and existence) and calling it **alienation**.

# Reification

- Then there is the word that translates into ‘reification’ (*Verdinglichung*), which many commentators think means alienation. It doesn’t. Then there is objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) as such. And then again, there are mentions of the dead dominating the living (alienation) that use **none** of these words: eg. the vampire bit above. If you want to test my thesis, then read the works and look for mentions of the dead burying the living. They are everywhere. And, against conventional wisdom, there are more in the later texts than the earlier. And when you get to *Capital*, make sure you read a version with ‘The Results of the Immediate Process of Production’ included. It is frequently left out. The Penguin editions include it.

# If you follow me

- So why do we bother with all of this? Why re-read Marx with an eye to a concept that has been buried? Why get angry at Althusser for telling us that alienation doesn't exist?
- The reason is simple. Today, Marxists are **frequently** of the two kinds that Marx and Engels fought against in their own lifetimes: Christians (this includes 'occupy' style Marxists with an eye on the top two percent) or determinists (usually those who still read Lenin and ask you if know how to shoot a gun). They began stealing Marxism 150 years ago, deaf to his living protestations, and now they have it. So all we hear today about Marx doesn't actually pertain to Marx. Whether you are being told about equality/wealth distribution or *diamat* and laws of history, you are not being told **anything** about **Marx**.

# Exceptions

- David Harvey, Cornelius Castoriadis, David McLennan, Agnes Heller, Georg Márkus, Albrecht Wellmer and Charles Thorpe. All have problems. But all are remarkable Marx scholars.

# So why alienation? Why is it better than the readings that you criticise?

- Today it seems that Marx only becomes relevant when people are made to nappies or some other such indignity. Marx is (in the normal view) a figure for the small, weak, and oppressed. Either you are being abused by capital, and thus you read Marx, or you are an altruist, hurt by the exploitation of others ...
- Alienation means that *everybody* is being abused by capital, and that Marx is relevant to everybody, *for their own sake*.
- Alienation as the dead ruling the living applies even if you're not wearing a nappy while you work. It applies to me, you, the homeless, the PM. We are all slaves to capital, on a scale that slides from **loving it** and **mistaking it for freedom** to **hating it** and **feeling it as oppression**.

# Necroculture

- As Charles Thorpe points out, alienation expresses itself in many ways, not all of them obviously related to Marx's works. For example, if you watch porn instead of having sex, you prefer something dead over something living. If you watch television instead of going for a walk, you are choosing something dead over something living. If you watch a concert through your iPhone, you are cutting off a living experience in expectation of a dead one later. If you prefer burning coal to absorbing sunlight, a gun to a book (and books are bad enough here too) then you are choosing death over life. You don't have to play SIMs for 8 hours a day to be guilty of death-worship here.

# The death cult

- In my original title for this talk, which was prudently edited by the powers that be, probably for good reason, I said that capitalism is a **death cult**. It is an organised cult of **supressing the needs and health of the living and subordinating them to the needs of capital/the dead**. (Putting profits over people).
- Neoliberals serve capital, and thus they serve the dead over the living. This is clear in policy.

# Neoliberal ideology in short

- Too much public health or education is a waste. Workers need only be smart and hale enough to produce surplus labour, and non-workers, as they cannot be killed, should be allowed to die. Refugees are a waste of space. They erode the surplus and are frequently too damaged to work. So we stop the boats.
- As for worker-citizens, we may be 'happy', in return for work, as long as this happiness is marketised and serves capital. You can pay for a film. Buy a meal. Pay for sex. If you can enjoy this circulation and accumulation of capital, good. But ultimately, your enjoyment is irrelevant. Capital must flow.

# The point ...

- If you missed it, the point is that today, misery is not a necessary accompaniment to the fact that capital is using you as a means to grow itself. As long as capital is growing, your exploitation can be rewarding for you, capital does not care. But it will grow. And if you stop enjoying working and consuming (your service to capital) capital will not let up on this account.
- The best we can hope for today is abuse that doesn't hurt too much, and that we at times enjoy. But never forget that it is abuse. As long as capitalism stands, the living serve the dead. That this service isn't all that bad for some does not make it freedom.

# Being and having

- The point (in different terms) is that you don't need to be in London in the 1850s having just lost your fingers to be in need of Marx, or in a Foxconn factory today in China, or wearing a nappy while dismembering chickens in the US. Watching Netflix, you are alienated. You are paying to be opiated. **Dead things** are more important in our world than **living things**.

# Another example

Every Liberal voter in Australia would rather a national surplus than better hospitals. **What is a surplus?** It is dead labour in a pile. Hoarded, objectified activity.

As the State hoards dead labour, so do you. You wrap yourself in dead labour, you pool it in your bank. You watch it and you eat it. You live in it. You personally are nothing in this world but a living source of this dead labour. It comes from us, while we work. Take away your watch, your clothes, your house, your savings and there is nothing left. In our world, success just means that you have a pile of somebody else's dead labour at your fingertips. You feel safe. You feel powerful. You feel that death is far from you. But you are nothing. Everything attractive about you is reflected. You can have whatever you want. But you are nothing.

# Post-capitalism

- In a post-capitalist world, living labour is made more important than dead labour. A hospital is now more important than a surplus. Stripped of your fancy clothes and devices, in a post-capitalist world, you are still worth something, because all humans are now worth something (something beyond the ability to be abused by capital).
- Marx didn't hate capitalism because it was 'unfair'. He didn't hate it because some people had **more** than **others**. Marx hated capitalism because **the living were the slaves of the dead**. I don't care what your job is. You are a slave to the dead. That is the problem of capitalism. That is why we need to understand this term alienation, which means that the dead rule the living.

# Final word

- There is no capitalism in which living labour will be in charge. Wayne Swan is complaining about capitalism at the moment, but all he is really talking about is making our enslavement more dignified. Marx is relevant, whether you clean toilets or are a CEO. All of us are slaves to capital, to the dead.
- Final word. The liberals have always told us that what is good for capital is good for us. But this is a lie. What is good for capitalism is identical to what is bad for us. What is good for us is bad for capital. Capital will not stand aside and let us change the world. It will not give us permission to kill it. But it will kill us if we don't take charge. At best, it will replace what is living with what is dead in our world. Fish will be replaced with plastic. Forests with golf courses. Everything will be shiny, and metal, and flawless. And dead. A big gun and two cars for everybody. Everybody not in prison ...

- Last month the (surprise) topic was nuclear war. When liberals say: the market must decide, trade must be free, capital must flow, they are really saying that the freedom of capital is all that matters. Capital is free today and we are not. Capital is in charge. Last century, we knew that this was part of the question of capitalism and communism: can we control things consciously or does the market do a better job?
- It is time to say that we should stop dreaming that capital cares about the survival of our planet or the perpetuation of our species. We know that it does not care. Capital flows towards its own growth. That is the only thing that it cares about. I am not willing to bet that capital will take us to a good future. The living need to start deciding where things are going. The end of capitalism is the end of the dead ruling the living. If capital could grow without us, it would be rid of us. Perhaps this is why capital pushes us to make AI. Is this something that the living really ought to want for themselves?

# Additional notes (in response to questions):

- ‘Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man ...’ Marx, 1844.
- For Marx, if your boss exploits you, he is not a ‘man’ exploiting you, he has become a zombie, a **capital-thing**. But never forget that capital is **us**. Capital is ‘man’. Dead labour is living activity that has taken on a solid form, a form that stands apart from us. Work is usually how we estrange our own activity from ourselves and make it a thing apart from us (how living bodies make dead labour).

# Notes

- In post-capitalism, we stop being alienated, **but we continue to alienate labour**. This is not a contradiction. It means that we are no longer **alienated**, because the living now control the dead and not *vice versa*. But we continue to alienate labour, because we still want machines, food, houses, things, plays, entertainment, time off.
- The difference is that we are now no longer fetishistically attracted to dead things, working in order to pile up dead things. In post-capitalism, we work to **be** more, not to **have** more (to paraphrase Fromm). And we (the living) control when and how we work and live (not the dead). We work only for our own benefit, and not for profit, which is growth as an end in itself, not growth for us.

# Notes

- Somebody suggested on the night of the talk that post-capitalism could be more **unequal** than capitalism. But this question (though I loved it, and thought on it all night afterward) ultimately makes no sense. In capitalism, where 'being rich' is the homogenised aim of all (being a **favoured slave** of capital) I am envious that my neighbour has more dead things than me, as these things cannot be had by me (or anybody else). In post-capitalism, where one accumulates talent, knowledge, personality, skills, imagination, **senses** etc., and not **dead things**, I am happy that my neighbour has a lot. Everybody contributes to the common wealth, which is open to me. The greater my neighbour, the greater is the common wealth that I can draw upon (the greater I am too).