Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: Economic Categories and Social Constitution

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Abstract

The distinction between ‘inquiry’ (Forschung) and ‘presentation’ (Darstellung) is important for the understanding of Capital. Its ‘mode of presentation’ (Darstellungweise) does not follow the narrative history of capitalist development but begins with the finished forms – money, commodities, exchange value, etc. - in which capitalist social relations reproduce themselves. It is not until the analysis of primitive accumulation in Part VIII that the historical presuppositions of the analysis of chapter 1 are presented. Marx’s critique of political economy is thus in reverse order to the actual, historical sequence in which the social relations underlying these categories developed. The paper argues that although these underlying relations seemingly disappear in capitalist social forms, they are constitutive of it.

Introduction

Over the last decade there has been an increase in the trafficking of women and children. New markets have emerged in human organs and babies. The proprietors of labour power are confronted not only with new forms of exploitation (see Caffentzis, 2003). They are also transformed into a dissectible resource to be operated on and sold. These developments have let some commentators to argue that we are witnessing the re-emergence of conditions of primitive accumulation (see, amongst others, Dalla Costa, 1995, 2003, de Angelis, 2001). These works show clearly that Marx's insight according to which ‘a great deal of capital, which appears today in the United States without certificate of birth, was yesterday, in England, the capitalist blood of children’ (Marx, 1983, p. 707), remains a powerful judgement of contemporary conditions.

The paper argues that primitive accumulation describes not just the period of transition that led to the emergence of capitalism. Its systematic content is in fact constitutive of capitalist social relations. It is the premise and presupposition of capitalistically organised social relations. Capitalist social relations rest on the divorce of the mass of the population from the means of production. This divorce was the result of primitive accumulation and is the historical presupposition and constitutive basis of capitalist social relations. At issue is thus the transformation of capitalism’s historical presupposition in dispossession into the constitutive premise of its existence. The conclusion looks at the consequences for socialist practice.

I

The separation of the means of labour from labour ‘is the foundation of [capitalist] production’ (Marx, 1972, p. 272).

Within the Marxist tradition, primitive accumulation is usually seen as an historical phase of transition from feudalism to capitalism. Capitalism developed out of primitive accumulation and once capitalism had been established, primitive accumulation was replaced by capitalist accumulation. It belongs to a historically specific process of transition towards capitalism (Zarembka, 2002). Some writers, for example Samir Amin, accept the time-specific delineation of primitive accumulation but add that it is also an inherent feature of the capitalist accumulation process as capital seeks to resolve crises of accumulation by means of imperialist subjugation of new populations. Writing in the 1970s, Amin (1974, p. 3) focuses this well when he argues that the mechanisms of primitive accumulation ‘do not belong only to the prehistory of capitalism; they are contemporary as well. It is these forms of primitive accumulation, modified but persistent, to the advantage of the centre, that form the domain of the theory of accumulation on a world scale’. Rosa Luxemburg’s (1963) contribution to the debate on imperialism at the start of the last Century argued similarly. Crises of capitalist accumulation find a temporary resolution in the imposition of conditions of primitive accumulation upon new populations, including the creation of new markets, discovery of new raw materials, and new and cheaper proletarians (see also Marx, 1966, ch. 14). Dispossession and expropriation are means of overcoming crises of capitalist reproduction. The werewolf hunger of capital for surplus labour, appropriating social labour time without an equivalent, develops through the expanded reproduction of dispossessed labour. That is to say, ‘to accumulate, is to conquer the world of social wealth, to increase the mass of human beings exploited by him, and thus to extend both the direct and the indirect sway of the capitalist’ (Marx, 1983, p. 555).

Akin to Marx’s discussion of, say, foreign trade as a counter-tendency to the tendency of the rate or profit to fall, one can thus argue that primitive accumulation, although the basis of the capitalist mode of production in its infancy, has become its own product through the innate necessity of this mode of production to not only create an ever expanding market but also to increase the ranks of the proletariat by means of continued dispossession. This dialectical figure, in which the presupposition of a process transforms into a necessary result of its operation, suggests that the relationship between accumulation by means of dispossession and accumulation by means of ‘making value expand itself’ (ibid.) through exploitation of free labour is more intricate than linear conceptions of historical time permit, however uneven the linearity.

Primitive accumulation is a process of transition towards capitalism. This is its historical dimension. The significance of this process is its systematic content, the divorce of labour from its means. This content is the ‘foundation of capitalist reproduction’ (Marx, 1983, p. 585). The treatment of primitive accumulation as a mere period of transition does take account of the epochal character of the struggle over the creation of the ‘free’ labourer. The divorce of labour from the means of production is not just a historical presupposition of capitalist social relations. It is the pre-condition and premise of capitalist social relations. As Marx (1973, p. 515) put it, ‘the exchange of labour for labour - seemingly the condition of the workers’ property - rests on the foundation of the workers’ propertylessness’. Capitalist accumulation reproduces its constitutive presupposition in dispossession as the result of its own operation. The labourer ‘constantly produces material, objective wealth, but in the form of capital, of an alien power that dominates and exploits [the labourer]: and the capitalist as constantly produces labour-power, but in the form of a subjective source of wealth, separated from
the objects in and by which it can alone be realised; in short he produces the labourer, but as a wage-labourer. This incessant reproduction, this perpetuation of the labourer, is the *sine qua non* of capitalist production' (Marx, 1983, pp. 535-36). Capitalism cannot divorce itself from its genesis. Rather, its genesis transforms into the premise of its existence, and becomes the product of its own reproduction.

The separation of 'genesis' from 'existence', which underlies discussion of primitive accumulation as a time-specific period of transition, tends to make economic categories appear as natural things, which objective laws of development set the framework for the acting subjects and class struggles. The divorce of genesis from existence, then, leads to conceptions of historical materialism that derive human social practice from always already existing, and in any case merely hypothesised, structures. A historical materialism of trans-historical objective laws is neither materialism nor historical. Neither 'nations' nor 'history' nor capital have made war. 'History does nothing, does not "possess vast wealth", does not "fight battles"! It is Man, rather, the real, living Man who does all that, who does possess and fight, it is not "history" that uses Man as a means to pursue its ends, as if it were a person apart. History is nothing but the activity of Man pursuing its ends' (Marx and Engels, 1980, p. 98). Historical materialism is the critique of things understood as dogmatic. It melts all that is solid into thin air.

'Commodity' exchange and 'money' pre-date capitalist production. For money, however, to be 'transformed into capital, the prerequisites for capitalist production must exist' (Marx, 1972, p. 272). The first historical presupposition is the separation of labour from her means and 'therefore the existence of the means of labour as capital' (ibid.). For Marx, this separation comprises a world's history. 'Commodity and money are transformed into capital because the worker ... is compelled to sell his labour itself (to sell directly his labour power) as a commodity to the owner of the objective conditions of labour. This separation is the prerequisite for the relationship of capital and wage labour in the same way as it is the prerequisite for the transformation of money (or of the commodity by which it is represented) into capital' (ibid., p. 89). Separation of labour from its means is the constitutive presupposition of capitalist social relations (Krahl, 1971, p. 223). It is both 'the foundation of [capitalist] production...[and] given in capitalist production' (Marx, 1972, p. 272). There is thus an inner connexion between the two forms of accumulation – the historical presupposition of mass expropriation is suspended in the necessity of the other as its secrete foundation. 'Every pre-condition of the social reproduction process is at the same time its result, and every one of its results appears simultaneously as its pre-condition' (Marx, 1972, p. 507). The systematic content of primitive accumulation seemingly disappears in capitalist accumulation but it does so only to reappear as its product.

II

What 'originally appeared as conditions of its becoming ... now appears as results of its own realization, reality, as *posited by it*' (Marx, 1973, p. 460).

The explosive 'separation of free labour from the objective conditions of its realization – from the means of production and the material of labour' (Marx, 1973, p. 471) appears now in the civilised form of contractual relations between equal legal subjects. Direct

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^2 As documented for example in E.P. Thompon's *The Making of the English Working Class*, or P. Linebaugh's *The London Hanged*. 

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coercion was replaced – at least for some - by (silent) economic compulsion. The existence of sellers and buyers on the labour market presupposes the creation of the working class and that is, the class antagonism between capital and labour, an antagonism in which the means of production are posited as capital and in which human productive power is posited as a commodity that can be hired to perform in the hidden abode of production. 'A presupposition of wage labour, and one of the historic preconditions for capital, is free labour and the exchange of this free labour for money, in order to reproduce and to [valorise] money, to consume the use value of labour not for individual consumption, but as use-value for money' (ibid., p. 375, adapted from German original). The conditions of work confront labour 'as alien capital' (Marx, 1972, p. 422) because they 'are lost to [the labourer] and have assumed the shape of alien property' (ibid.). That is to say, 'object-less free labour (Marx, 1973, p. 507) ‘forms (bildet) the conception (Begriff) of capital' (Marx, 1966, p. 246). The capitalist property rights rest on the divorce of labour from her means, forcing object-less free labour to come 'under the command of capital' (Marx, 1973, p. 508) so as to make a living. Economic compulsion, not the satisfaction of human needs, governs the freedom and liberty of ostensibly equal exchange relations between capitalist and worker.

Instead of relations of personal dependency, individuals are governed by abstractions. Economic compulsion appears to issue directly from the things themselves, and human purposeful activity appears to derive from them. The dependency on the impersonal world of things is founded on the logic of separation. It seems as if the world existed twice, once as economic thing and then as human derivative of that thing. In capitalist society, individuals produce in and for society as social individuals. Yet, at the same time, their production appears as a mere means of objectifying their individuality as personifications of things. Thus, their existence as private persons in a social context entails the social individual as an individualised individual whose sociability is achieved not in a direct way but indirectly by the things themselves. In short, human social practice subsists through things as if society is a person apart. Capital is thus not only 'the form assumed by the conditions of labour' (Marx, 1972, p. 492). It is also, and because of this, posited as a (perverted) social subject: it transforms the products of labour into commodities and makes the commodity appear as 'a product of capital' (Marx, 1966, p. 880). In essence, capital ‘is the existence of social labour – the combination of labour as subject as well as object – but this existence as itself existing independently opposite its real moments – hence itself a particular existence apart from them. For its part, capital therefore appears as the predominant subject and owner of alienated labour, and its relation is itself as complete a contradiction as is that of wage labour’ (Marx, 1973, p. 471). The extreme expression of this contradiction is interest-bearing capital: the 'most externalised and most fetish-like form' of capital (Marx, 1966, p. 391). And the ‘wage’ - the defining characteristic of wage labour? ‘Labour - wages, or price of labour’ is an expression that 'is just as irrational as a yellow logarithm' (ibid., p. 818). What, then, needs to be explained is not the relation between capital and wage labour in its direct and immediate sense – say, capital as subject or as structural power - but rather the social constitution upon which this relationship is founded and through which it subsists (cf. Marx, 1966, ch. 48). Capital's presupposition in the expropriation of the direct producer, which ‘originally appeared as conditions of its becoming - and hence could not spring from its action as capital – now appears as results of its own realization, reality, as posited by it - not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence’ (Marx, 1973, p. 460). What does it mean to say that the original separation between
capital and labour transforms into the premise of capitalist class relations and becomes the result of their reproduction?

In the German original, Marx does not speak about 'primitive' accumulation. This term is offered in the English translation and, I suppose, it is as close to the German original as that is possible. Yet, it is inaccurate. The German text says 'ursprünglich'. This term can also be translated as 'original', 'initial', 'unspoiled', as well as 'beginning', 'first manifestation', and 'springing to live'. The term does not connote 'causality', where, say, an historical event 'causes' the formation of a distinct mode of social relations. Instead the term enquires about the genesis of the existent - better: it enquires about the existent in its genesis. That is to say, the anatomy of Man can explain the anatomy of the ape, but not conversely, the anatomy of the ape does not explain the anatomy of Man. Historical development is not the consequence of abstract historical laws that evolve by force of natural-historical necessity. History does not fight battles. Man does. Man conquers, kills, and fights. If the anatomy of the ape would really explain the anatomy of Man than the ape would already possess Man as the innate necessity of its evolution – a natural teleology or an already written future. That is to say, and drawing on Marx's critique of the 'economist's' naturalisation of economic categories, such approach would present the capitalist mode of production as 'encased in eternal natural laws independent of history', and it is this conception of that allows the 'economists' to smuggle capitalist relations in as the 'inviolable natural laws on which society and history in the abstract are founded' (Marx, 1973, p. 87). Primitive accumulation is primitive only from the standpoint of capitalist accumulation. Conceived as an ursprüngliche accumulation it is not primitive at all – its terror has been 'written into the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire' (Marx, 1983, p. 669).

Capitalism's original beginning weights like a nightmare on the capitalistically organised form of human social labour. Not only is it 'object-less, free labour ... under the command of capital' (cf. Marx, 1973, pp. 507, 508). It also vanishes in its own social world, and appears in economic categories, such as capital, profit and rate of interest, that seem devoid of any human-social content. Thus, the capitalist and wage-labourer 'are as such merely embodiments, personifications of capital and wage-labour; definite social characteristics stamped upon individuals by the process of social production' (ibid.). Capitalist and wage-labourer appear as human derivatives of those same economic categories that resulted from the class struggle over the original expropriation of the mass of the population from the means of subsistence. However, social constitution is historical constitution, and that is, despite its disappearance in capitalist social forms, the constitutive presupposition of capitalism is also its permanent premise.

What is to be understood by 'permanent' in this context? In Latin, 'per' means through, way; and 'manere' means to remain, to be continuous; permanent then connotes a lasting character, something maintained through and also in time. Regarding primitive accumulation, permanence means that the divorce of labour from the means of production is the innate necessity of capitalist social relations. Capitalist accumulation entails reproduction of the fundamental process of separation, a process of separation, in which nothing remains in the way it was and in which, and at the same time, the essential relations between the classes remains unchanged: capital on the one hand, and the doubly free labourer, on the other. Adorno (1975) concept of 'dynamic within stasis' focuses this well: capitalism is a dynamic, ever developing and changing configuration of social relations, where everything that is solid melts, at the same time as
which the ‘law’ of development remains unchanged: restless exploitation of object-less labour, sacrificing human purposeful practice on the altar of profit. That is to say, the freedom of labour from its conditions entails the capitalist property right to preserve abstract wealth through the ‘sacrifice of “human machines” on the pyramids of accumulation’ (Gambino, 1996, p. 55). The law of capital can thus be summarised as follows: the law is what remains in disappearance. Whatever the specific and changing historical forms of capitalism, it rests on and develops by force of ‘the logic of separation’.

I have argued that primitive accumulation is the historical presupposition of capital, and that its systematic content forms the foundation of capitalist social relations. Its content is suspended in capitalist economic forms. The critical issue here is the precise meaning of ‘suspended’ (aufgehoben). ‘Suspended’ is usually used as the English translation of the German term ’aufgehoben’ or Aufhebung. Aufhebung is a term that is most difficult to translate into English, and ‘suspended’ does not carry the full meaning of this typically many-sided German term. The notion that primitive accumulation is ‘suspended’ in capitalist accumulation does not collapses two distinct concepts, as if there were no difference between accumulation by dispossession and accumulation by means of valorisation. This difference is important, but so, too, is the inner connexion between them.

In Hegelian language, Aufhebung connotes a dialectical process of determinate negation. That is, the determination of a term negates it at the same time as which the so negated term transforms into a new term. In this process, the negated term loses its independent existence and it does so at the same time as which its essence is retained in the new term – the new term is informed by the negated term. The circumstance that the essence of the negated term is maintained in the new term means that the essence of the old term is also the essence of the new term. Aufhebung has more than just different meanings; they are also contradictory. The concept entails all these different and contradictory meanings. Aufheben has three main meanings: ‘to lift up’ or ‘to raise’; ‘to make invalid’ or ‘to cancel/eliminate’; and ‘to keep’ or ‘to maintain’. In our context, Aufhebung means that the historic form of primitive accumulation is raised to a new level where its original form and independent existence is eliminated (or cancelled) at the same time as its substance or essence (Wesenshaftigkeit) is maintained in the new form. In other words, the notion that the essence of primitive accumulation is aufgehoben in accumulation proper means that the principle of primitive accumulation, that is accumulation of wealth by means of dispossession and expropriation, is raised to a new level, eliminating the history of primitive accumulation as a specific epoch. At the same time its essential character is maintained in the new form, that is, the historical presupposition of capitalism becomes the premise of its existence: ‘object-less free labour’ becomes the result of a process of accumulation that is based on the appropriation of the surplus labour that capital is able to extract, and validate in circulation in terms of socially necessary labour time, from the free labourer in the hidden abode of production. Paraphrasing Marx’s treatment of the commodity, the process of the disappearance of primitive accumulation in accumulation proper ‘must, therefore, appear at the same time as a process of the disappearance of its disappearance, i.e. as a reproduction process’ (Marx, 1987, p. 98). In short, the argument that primitive accumulation is suspended in capitalist accumulation emphasises ‘the logic of separation’ as the secrete constitution of capitalist social relations.
I argued above that social constitution is historical constitution, and that it is not the anatomy of the ape that explains the anatomy of Man but that it is instead the anatomy of Man that explains the anatomy of the ape. This contention rejects both teleological explanations, such as Adam Smith’s stages theory, and connected natural law explanations of history, such as, again, Adam Smith’s natural propensity of Man to barter and truck. Marx’s presentation of the historical presupposition of the commodity form in Part VIII of Volume I of Capital is thus in part explained by the insight that the significance of primitive accumulation does not lay in primitive accumulation as an historical thing in itself but, rather, in capitalist accumulation. There is no universal history that leads to primitive accumulation as a historically necessary transition to capitalism. That is to say, capitalist accumulation ‘illuminates’ the historical significance of primitive accumulation, and not the other way round.

Capital seeks to ‘trace out the inner connexion’ between the decisive economic categories of capitalism (Marx, 1983, p. 28). It would therefore be ‘unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society’ (Marx, 1973, p. 107). It would also be wrong to argue that Part VIII of Capital is merely added on to the analysis of capitalism. Although the ‘mode of presentation’ does not parallel the actual course of events, it does presuppose them. With the exception of Horkheimer’s (1992) essays of the 1930s, the distinction between inquiry (Forschung) and presentation (Darstellung) has by and large been ignored by commentators on Marx’s Capital (see, however, Schmidt, 1968, Psychopedis, 1992). Following Alfred Schmidt’s account, the understanding of Capital ‘stands and falls with the concept of presentation’ (Schmidt, 1968, pp. 35-6). For Schmidt Capital’s ‘mode of presentation’ (Darstellungweise) does not follow the narrative history of its development but begins with the finished forms – money, commodities, exchange value, etc., - in which the capitalist social relations reproduce themselves. Marx’s argument in Capital is in reverse order to the actual, historical sequence in which the social relations underlying these categories developed. It is their historical presupposition. That is to say, in the first volume of Capital, it is not until the analysis of primitive accumulation in Part VIII that the historical presuppositions of the analysis of commodity fetishism developed in chapter 1 are presented. The categories of value, exchange value, money, capital, exploitation, surplus value, capital accumulation, etc., presuppose the systematic content of primitive accumulation in their conceptuality.

The constituted categories of capitalist economic forms presuppose the formation of the wage labourer, a labourer free of the means of production, free to sell his/her ability to work, and a labourer upon whom labour discipline has been instilled, more often than not by means of terror and always abject poverty (Perelman, 2000). Thus ‘the method of presentation must differ from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out the inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction’ (Marx, 1983, p. 28). The
logical development of the decisive economic forms takes ‘a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development’ (ibid., p. 80). That is to say, the analysis ‘begins, post festum, with the result of the process of development already in hand… The characters that stamp products as commodities, and whose establishment is a necessary preliminary to the circulation of commodities, have already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life, before man seeks to decipher, not their historical character…but their meaning’ (ibid.). What then is the meaning of capitalist accumulation? Does the circumstance that the valorisation of capital by means of exploitation presupposes the creation of the free labourer by means of dispossession and expropriation have any bearing on capitalist accumulation?

IV

The separation of labour from the means of production ‘is given in capitalist production’ (Marx, 1972, p. 272).

Marx was clear about the meaning of so-called primitive accumulation. As he put it at the very end of Capital volume I, ‘the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of self-earned private property; in other words: the expropriation of the labourer’ (Marx, 1983, p. 724). I have argued that, once the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, the fundamental condition of its genesis transforms into the product of its own process of reproduction. Its genesis is suspended in its existence.

The transformation of historical presupposition into the result of its reproduction is clearly at issue when Marx argues that ‘capitalist production … of itself reproduces the separation between labour-power and the means of labour’ (Marx, 1983, p. 541). It does so by perpetuating the ‘conditions for exploiting the labourer. It incessantly forces him to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour power… it is the process itself that incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him’ (ibid., pp. 541-42). The logic of separation thus means not only class antagonism but also mutual presupposition. That is, ‘capital pre-supposes wage-labour, and wage-labour pre-supposes capital. One is a necessary condition of the other; they mutually call each other into existence. Does an operative in a cotton-factory produce nothing but cotton goods? No, he produces capital. He produces fresh values that give fresh command over his labour, and that, by means of such command, create fresh values’ (ibid., p. 542, fn. 3). Commodities must be realised as values. ‘The fact that value - whether it exists as money or as commodities - and in the further development the conditions of labour confront the worker as the property of other people', as independent properties, means simply that they confront him as the property of the non-worker or, at any rate, that, as a capitalist, he confronts them [the conditions of labour] not as a worker but as the owner of value, etc., as the subject in which these things possess their own will, belong to themselves and are personified as independent forces’ (Marx, 1972, pp. 475-76). Capital appears here as the subject incarnate of the invisible hand – a transcendental subject that is neither this nor that, and yet both at the same time. Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism does not reject the reality of the invisible hand that, with unyielding steadiness, regulates the satisfaction of human needs by reproducing the inequality in property between capital and labour on an expanding scale. Instead, his critique of the fetishism of commodities
reveals its social constitution in human practice. The world of things manifests itself behind the backs of the individuals, yet it is their work.

Having developed the categories of value, value form, use-value and exchange value, abstract labour and concrete labour, the argument moves forward, from the transformation of money as money into money as capital, to the analysis of the buying and selling of labour power. Then it follows the free labourer into the factory, analysing the relationship between necessary labour and surplus labour, the constituent parts of the working day. Here capital sets the free labourer to work attempting to appropriate as much labour time as possible – in effect an attempt at expropriating the life-time of the labourer. From the production of surplus value we arrive at the re-conversion of surplus value into capital. This conversion ‘reveals’ the transaction between capital and free labour as the same ‘old dodge of every conqueror who buyers commodities from the conquered with the money he has robbed them off’ (Marx, 1983, p. 546). Thus the fiction of the law of equal exchange: the ‘separation of property from labour has become the necessary consequence of a law that apparently originated in their identity’ (ibid., p. 547).

On the other hand, the individual capitalist has constantly to expand ‘his capital, in order to preserve it, but extend it he cannot, except by means of progressive accumulation’ (Marx, 1983, p. 555). The risk is bankruptcy. Thus, mediated through competition, personified capital is spurred into action. ‘Fanatically bent on making value expand itself, [the personified capitalist] ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production’s sake’, increasing ‘the mass of human beings exploited by him’ (ibid.). In sum, the law of private property entails that ‘labor capacity has appropriated for itself only the subjective conditions of necessary labour - the means of subsistence for actively producing labour capacity, i.e. for its reproduction as mere labour capacity separated from the conditions of its realization - and it has posited these conditions themselves as things, values, which confront it in an alien, commanding personification’ (Marx, 1973, pp. 452-53).

Turning finally to capitalist accumulation, Marx argues that it ‘merely presents as a continuous process what in primitive accumulation, appears as a distinct historical process, as the process of the emergence of capital’ (Marx, 1972 p. 272; and Marx, 1983, p. 688). Capital accumulation reproduces the underlying relationship between capital and labour, and the analysis of the fate of the worker shows primitive accumulation as an essential concept for the analysis of the ongoing process of capitalist accumulation. Capitalist accumulation also continues the process of expropriation as a result of its own process. This is the process of capital centralisation. Centralisation of capital is not accumulation by means of value expansion. Instead, centralisation is a form of expropriation. ‘One capitalist kills many’ (Marx, 1983, p. 714). At the same time, ‘the capitalist reproduces himself as capital as well as the living labour capacity confronting him’ (Marx, 1973, p. 458). ‘Each reproduces itself, by reproducing the other, its negation. The capitalist produces labour as alien; labour produces the product as alien’ (ibid.). Leaving aside his desperately triumphal remarks when analysing the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation – the ‘centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. Thus integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated’ (Marx, 1983, p. 715) – his development of the economic forms reveals dispossession as the condition of the oppressed at every turn. It is the premise of capital, and the basis of capitalist class relations.
In sum, the ‘logic of separation’, which as Marx insists, is constitutive of capital, ‘begins with primitive accumulation, appears as a permanent process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, and expresses itself finally as centralisation of existing capitals in a few hands and a deprivation of many of their capital (to which expropriation is now changed)’ (Marx, 1966, p. 246). It is now also in the process of transforming the individual owner of redundant or, in any case, superfluous labour-power into a bodily thing that can be hired out or dissected into saleable parts. Humanity is ‘turned topsy turvey, vivisectioned, and made a commodity’ (Dalla Costa, 1995b, p. 12). Marx’s notion of the doubly free wage labourer appears to have been transformed. The doubly free wage labourer has indeed become, at least for a growing part of humanity, more than just a labouring commodity. It has also become a carrier of body substances that, like any other commodity, can be sold on the market at prevailing prices (cf. Bonefeld, 2006).

Conclusion
The violence of capital’s original beginning is the formative content of the ‘civilised’ forms of equality, liberty, freedom, and utility. These forms mystify the real content of bourgeois ‘equality’ - violence hides in civilised forms (cf. Benjamin, 1965). The labour contract focuses well the class content of bourgeois freedom and equality. It connects the exchange ostensibly undertaken between equal legal subjects in freedom and liberty with exploitation. Luxemburg’s dictum ‘socialism or barbarism’ recognises that the ‘civilised forms’ of capitalist accumulation have a barbaric content. We must attain a conception of capitalist economic categories that is in keeping with this insight.

What is the significance of this for human emancipation? How might one recover human purpose in opposition to the bad-infinity of an economic system that, by sacrificing nature and humanity alike on the altar of profit, produces abstract wealth for the sake of abstract wealth? Human emancipation entails reconciliation of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature. It entails overcoming the ‘separation between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital’ (Marx, 1973, p. 489). Marx’s frequent reference to the associated producers does point towards the overcoming of separation as a socialist means and end. It tackles the secrete foundation of capitalist social relations in dispossession and knows that the class antagonism, although developing through exploitation, rests on the divorce of labour from its means (cf. Bonefeld, 2002). What is thus at issue is not the seizure of bourgeois institutions but their subversion. That is to say, ‘the society of the free and equal’ (cf. Agnoli, 2000) or, as Marcuse (2000) put it, the ‘association of communist individuals’ cannot be build on the basis of separation. Instead, it is ‘precisely necessary to avoid ever again to counterpose “society” as an abstraction, to the individual’ (Marx, 1959, p. 93). Emancipation means that human kind ‘recognises and organises his “forces propres” as social forces and thus no longer separates social forces from himself in the form of political forces’ and also economic forces (Marx, 1964, p. 370).

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3 As the father of utilitarianism put it when recommending that children be put to work at four rather than fourteen: ‘ten precious years in which nothing is done! Nothing for industry! Nothing for improvement, moral or intellectual!’ (quoted in Perelman, 2000, p. 22). Ten lost years!
Marx saw this new form of society anticipated in the ‘community of revolutionary proletarians, who extend their own control over the conditions of their own existence and those of all members of society. It is as individuals that the individuals participate in it. It is exactly this combination of individuals (assuming the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals under their control - conditions which were previously abandoned to chance and had won an independent existence over and against the separate individuals precisely because of their separation as individuals’ (Marx and Engels, 1962, p. 74). For human beings to enter into relationship with one another, not as personifications of economic categories, but as social individuals, who are in control of their social conditions, struggle for the democratic organisation of social time, emancipating it from its capitalist reduction to cash and product, is of the essence.

Paraphrasing Adorno (1975, p. 44), full-employment makes sense in a society where labour is no longer the measure of all things. That is, it makes sense in a society where the measure of all things is the satisfaction of individual human needs, and where equality is no longer an equality before money but, rather, an equality of needs. How much labour time was needed in 2007 to produce the same amount of commodities that was produced in 1997? Twenty percent, forty percent, or fifty percent? Whatever the percentage might be, what is certain is that labour time has not decreased. It has increased. What is certain too is that the distribution of wealth is as unequal as never before. And how does bourgeois society cope with the expansion of ‘redundant populations’, on the one hand, and, on the other, the overaccumulation of abstract wealth, of capital? The contradiction between the forces and relations of production does seeks resolution: destruction of productive forces, scrapping of labour through war and generalised poverty and misery, lengthening of the working day and all this against the background of an unprecedented accumulation of wealth, mass unemployment, and the ever more destructive attempts to valorise atoms of labour-time through greater labour flexibility. This continued conquest of atoms of additional labour-time corrodes the character (cf. Sennet, 1998), and thus stands in direct opposition to the character of the democratic personality. The ongoing conversion of human beings into a resourceful utility, cash and product, is founded on a conception of social time which holds that time is money. Time as the measure of wealth is not the time of the democratic individual (cf. Tischler, 2005). The democratic organization of socially necessary labour time by the associated producers themselves has thus one ‘basic prerequisite’, and that is, the struggle for the ‘shortening of the working day’ (Marx, 1966, p. 820).

This struggle entails politicisation of social relations. Discussion of this issue is beyond the remit of this paper. Suffice to say that such politicisation does entail social conflict, which might force bourgeois society into making material concessions in an attempt to divide and rule; better still, it might succeed in transforming the means of production into the common property of the communist individuals, or it might bring to power ‘well-meaning dictators…genuinely anxious to restore’ the subordination of human needs to the free prize mechanism (Hayek in praise of Pinochet, cited in Cristi, 1998, p. 168). There is no certainty.

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4 On the connection between primitive accumulation and the expropriation of time, see Krahl, 1984.
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