



Call for Papers for an *ephemera* Special Issue on:

Communism of Capital?

Issue Editors: Armin Beverungen, Anna-Maria Murtola
and Gregory Schwartz

Deadline for submissions: 29 February 2012

Today, neoliberal capitalism is increasingly put into question. Whereas two decades ago business school gurus argued that the US was ‘the most “socialist” country around’ (Drucker, 1993: 6), today’s self-appointed business leaders know they cannot do without a certain communism. George Soros, Bill Gates and others refer to themselves – not without irony – as ‘liberal communists’ (Žižek, 2008a). Recognising the evils induced by capitalism these patricians of the market proselytise market philanthropy to deliver many of the ostensible benefits of the communism of yore. *Newsweek*, reflecting on the national bailout of the banks in response to the financial crisis, declared: ‘We are all socialists now’ (Meacham, 2009). Yet, the one thing that seems beyond question in such projections of communism is capital itself.

At the same time, theories of cognitive capitalism, immaterial labour and biopolitical production suggest that some kind of communism is already at work within capitalism. According to Hardt and Negri, immaterial labour ‘seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism’ (2000: 294). Similarly, Virno defines post-Fordism as ‘the communism of capital’, since it ‘puts forth, *in its own way*, typical demands of communism (abolition of work, dissolution of the State, etc.)’ (2004: 110-111). The contemporary enjoinders to pursue work that is authentic, ethical, spiritual, evoking and invoking the community, friendship and collaboration (Heckscher and Adler, 2006), chime in with invitations for employees in work organisations to ‘just be themselves’ (Fleming, 2009), thus delivering on some of the promises of communism. From a ‘paleo-Marxist’ perspective (Adler, 2007) we can surmise that concrete changes in technology and work organisation assure us some version of communism in substance, if not in form.

However, such projections of work organisation rely on a commons in production without opening up production to a commons that will tear apart the dominance of capital. For Negri (2008: 157-180), the communism of capital is marked by new forms of capture of the creativity of labour. For Virno (2004: 110), communist demands and objectives have been subject to ‘an insidious and terrible interpretation’, for example in the way that unemployment and precarity accompany overwork. For Holloway (2010), more fundamentally, it is the

communal, communising and communistic *doing* that, in capitalism, exists in the mode of being denied. For Read, capital operates ‘through the abstractions of money and labour, which are all the more effective in that they are not believed or even grasped’ – ‘the cynicism of the productive powers of the general intellect today, is a cynicism without reserve, in which every aspect of one’s existence, knowledge, communicative abilities and desires become productive’ (2008: 146, 150). The question for Negri, Virno, Holloway and Read, then, is how to overcome this enclosure by capital.

Yet even *anti*-capitalism seems to return only as communism of capital. As Žižek (2008b) and Fisher (2010) point out, capitalist realism already embraces a certain kind of anti-capitalism – ‘corporate anti-capitalism’ is discernible in the products of Hollywood, such as *Wall-E* and *Avatar*, but also in the way that today it is acceptable or encouraged to express anti-capitalist sentiments at work (Fleming, 2009). Anti-capitalism as a signifier thus loses its radical edge, especially as it is contained within a parliamentary democratic politics (Žižek, 2008b: 184). Indeed, the more gushing the moralism against the evils of our age, the more certain the conclusion that capitalism is an eternal, natural system of social organisation.

At this impasse we might be at once more sceptical and more hopeful. We might hedge doubts about the communism of capital in view of Groys’ (2009) argument that language – the basis of a communist politics – will remain silent as long as the commodity form mediates it. We might question the communism of capital by insisting, with Ranciere (2010), on the politics of emancipation and not the *logos* of history as the purveyor of communism. We might deny its ethical claims by revealing the underlying ‘ontology of profit’ (Badiou, 2008: 47) – that with capitalism as ‘a system that hands the organization of our collective life over to the lowest instincts, to greed, rivalry and unconscious egotism’ (Badiou, 2010: 96) the communism of capital is a simulacra of late capitalism. And if communism is ‘not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself’, then where are we to look for ‘the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things’ (Marx and Engels, 1998: 57; emphases in original)?

Contributions

For this special issue of *ephemera* we invite contributions that address various aspects of what could be conceived as the communism of capital. We are especially interested in papers that try to cover the following interrelated areas of organisational inquiry.

First, we are interested in contributions that seek to locate the attempts by capital to organise society as producers. For example, in what ways are social forms mobilised in the name of a discernible communism, and how do such *dispositifs* reproduce the dominance of capital? Based on postworkerist/autonomist thought,

how or to what extent is production based on the common, and what kinds of political effects does this produce? Alternatively, drawing on the Lacanian/Hegelian tradition, how does anti-capitalist ideology work in practice in the organisation of work, and what negotiations and contradictions are involved?

Second, papers could explore how capital organises consumption in society via affective, discursive and cognitive means. For example, how do contemporary ideas of corporate social responsibility, business ethics or leadership utilise ideas of communism? In what ways, and to what extent, do efforts to purvey capitalism as, essentially, a creature of communism lead to new ways of constructing (and consuming) the subjects of capital?

Third, we welcome papers that interrogate how capital organises politics and the state. For example, there is a way in which the state, by over-coding existing codes and values, uses the terminology and imagery of ‘community’ to refer to ways of fragmenting and depoliticising its social responsibility in the face of escalating inequality, poverty and precarity generated by capital. How might we understand this apparent harkening to deep-seated, basic communalism in terms of the communism of capital, with the state presiding over the inscription of the social body as a renewed object of appropriation of capital?

Finally, we welcome theoretical or empirical contributions that bring together or provide a cross-examination of some or all of the above areas of inquiry. For example, following Guattari and Negri’s (2010) proposition of the pre-eminence of organisation, how might we move from the communism of capital towards the communism discussed by Marx and Engels in 1848? Or, in addition to the post-workerist, autonomist, Lacan- and Hegel-inspired approaches that we have discussed here, in what other ways might communism, beyond capital, today be thought or advanced?

Deadline for submissions: 29th of February 2012

Please send your submissions to the editors. All contributions should follow *ephemera* guidelines – see <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/submit.htm>. In addition to full papers, we also invite notes, reviews, and other kinds of contributions – please get in touch to discuss how you would like to contribute. In anticipation of the special issue, we plan to host an event on the themes, at which we will ask the selected contributors to present their work.

Armin Beverungen, armin.beverungen@googlemail.com

Anna-Maria Murtola, annamariamurtola@gmail.com

Gregory Schwartz, g.schwartz01@gmail.com

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