

## ***Indigenous Marx. A Becoming-Earthling of Communism***

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### **Abstract**

Presented in Paris on 7 April 2017 on the occasion of the symposium "[Political conflict: logics and practices](#)", then available on the site [la vie manifeste](#), this text is interested in the process of primitive accumulation and thus the devices of subjectivation and dispossession put in place to produce the space-time of capitalism. The concept of primitive accumulation makes it possible to approach the division at the heart of the deterritorialization-reterritorialization movement inherent in dispossession and constitutive of the dyad: the misery of the people – the wealth of the nation. By exposing the unproductiveness of the people, by exposing workers-the excluded-the indigenous synchronically, the current practices of resistance make visible the recessed production of a common encrypted in dispossession.

What I am presenting here is intended to evoke some elements of an ongoing investigation into the cohabitation of dispossessions within capitalist space-time, paying particular attention to learning (taking up the term of Isabelle Stengers, who opposes learning to becoming conscious of), as related to the occurrence of North American indigenous struggles in the continuum of contemporary resistance practices.

The concept of primitive accumulation (in the loose filiation of Marx, Meiksins Wood, Perelman, Harvey, Federici, Coulthard, Alliez and Lazzarato) provides for this purpose a schema of intelligibility which, through a political history of matter, gives rise to a geography and a scenography of the conflict – the latter making visible the recessed production (*production en creux*) of a common of this resistance whose reference would be, that's what I want to stress, an original dispossession.

Through this work of elucidation, it is a question of managing to articulate on the same plane of existence, that of general unproductiveness, the industrial, cosmopolitan and indigenous devices (*dispositifs*) of subjectivation and dispossession, as well as resistance to the latter, and to evoke the lines of flight of a becoming-earthling of communism.

## Primitive accumulation

There is no doubt that the most original division that gave rise to the ordering of the space-time of capitalism in which we operate is the one Marx dramatizes in section 8 of *Capital* under the theme of the so-called primitive accumulation.

The process of primitive accumulation, in the perspective of historical materialism, can be divided into three propositions:

(1) It is a historical process by which peoples making use of the land autonomously, or pseudo-autonomously, to ensure their subsistence (peasants, the indigenous, women – and by extension, all humanity) are the object of an explicit policy of snatching<sup>1</sup> from the land, and more specifically of a politics of deterritorialization.

(2) This process involves the production of a “radical separation of the producer from the means of production”, a separation of the body and the territory, which enables a reconfiguration of the territory (which becomes capital) and of the body (which becomes the social division of labor) so as to assemble them in a coherent whole of value production in the generalized form of credit (money, support of capital).

(3) This political work requires the explicit implementation of “extra-economic means”, and therefore the direct intervention of the mobilized power of the sovereign State: (a) legal measures relating to the legal status of land and labor; (b) police measures, measures of repression, of imprisonment, of detention, of kidnapping kids, of reform, of discipline of the uprooted body; (c) the implementation of mass vulnerability devices (especially hunger and debt); (d) collateral damage: in particular, expropriation, confiscation, fraud, desertification, intoxication, pollution, conquest, war, terror for the capture of territory. These extra-economic means are mobilized and put into effect within the frame of a reterritorialization of the body for the advent of a total machine of production and consumption – which gives rise to this habitable space-time of capitalism – the *khôra* of primitive accumulation.

If Marx, by an excess of Hegelianism, could believe that the process of primitive accumulation was both a circumscribed phenomenon in history (and in fact, belonging to the past) and a necessary if painful passage towards communism, contemporary works have shown that the phases of primitive accumulation are recurrent in the history of capitalism, that the devices (*dispositifs*) for the separation of producers and means of production are polymorphous, encrypted in operators of flexible and reified relations, that they are scattered over the whole *socius*, and that the dispossessed can be the object of multiple processes of primitive accumulation,

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<sup>1</sup> The French word used, *arrachement*, also means the intense pain implied by the separation. [TN]

simultaneously and on different plateaux of dispossession, and this without ever having access to the proto-emancipated status of the proletariat and therefore to the privileged claim of a common possession of the means of production.

The political devices of separation of the body and of the territory are in fact of a performative order (they are an arcanum), and their operation is not inscribed on any spiritual horizon. In other words: the hidden face of capital is necessarily the state, that is to say that the maintenance over time of the global project of indefinite accumulation requires the constant use of terrorist devices of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

### **Nature of the division**

By inserting it into the fabric of this “tradition of the oppressed” evoked by Walter Benjamin, it is possible to overturn the historico-theoretical apparatus of primitive accumulation, and to take into consideration not the fact of primitive accumulation as a process of capture, but rather the fact of the production of an encrypted common, an encryption of the common.

Evoking the possibility of this “view from below”, Marx admirably synthesizes the division that is played out in the process of primitive accumulation, when he writes: “The capitalist formula is: the wealth of the nation is inseparable from the misery of the people”. He points out in this regard that “The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the collective possessions of modern peoples is their national debt. Hence, as a necessary consequence, the modern doctrine that a nation becomes the richer the more deeply it is in debt.” (*Capital*, vol. I, pt. VIII, ch. 31).

It seems to me that it is on this dividing line, that which opposes the people to the nation, in which Foucault saw the forced conversion of the people to the status of population, that all the historical resistance to capitalism is played out, and that primitive dispossession is in this respect the only possible name for a common, original, performative, chronic condition of radical separation of the producer from the means of production.

### **Theater of dispossession**

Collective contemporary practices of resistance, whether they be called strikes, occupations, or blockades, are the privileged theater of the revelation of the community of primitive dispossession. Theater of dispossession, theater of cruelty, the practices of collective protest give place to scenes in which a total commitment of the flesh in itself makes visible the work of the powers of dispossession. They make

it possible to interfere in it, to play with it, to suffer from it, to address it, and to risk losing an eye, and to risk dying from it. “Like a stage, but real”, as Michael Taussig said about the rituals of political possession in Caracas in the 1990s.

The spirit of this theater, its myth, is always that of the general strike, even truncated, even failed, even hushed, as a plane of existence where it is possible to fit collectively into reality at the degree zero of power. The unproductiveness is a medium of visualization, by which peoples can appear to themselves as misery, at this intersection where their dispossession constitutes the wealth of the nation.

A first stage technique of the theater of contemporary primitive dispossession (first in the sense of its historical prestige in the communist movement) is that of the strike. The strike of the workers, alienated producers of primitive dispossession, which is played within the limits of socially divided production areas – workplaces. This strike is walkouts, jamming, stoppage, sabotage, looting, derailment of the industrial production machine.

The ritual of the strike, with its accredited mediums and reified recipients, serves to assert to the expropriators, a co-ownership of the powers of production of the real. It is the fathers’ strike that challenges the law (of ownership of the means of production) in the name of the law (of productive force). As the fable says, “the law of the strongest is always the best, we will show it just now”.

What is readable in the strike is the capture constituted by the social division of labor, and it is the misery of the people that sees itself playing with the powers of the production of the real in the separated form of productive force – to see oneself be seen, to see oneself from without as the roaming residue of a machinic levy. It is hence not surprising that the strike induces, towards the end, and especially after having “made gains”, a philosophical disgust.

The other great contemporary scenic technique of dispossession is that of occupation. Festive occupations, demonstrations, marches, counter-summits, camps, encampments, sit-ins, bed-ins, and all forms of ritual takings of the symbolic places of power. The nation and the people are then put face to face. In the form of the imago (capital, rulers, the Summit, the 1%), the ownership of the appropriation of power is challenged, contested, pointed at – indeed, the people take power, they occupy the center, the Republic, Wall Street, as they joust, play at having power, playing the autonomous organization, playing at direct democracy, to pretend that the people were the nation and the nation was sovereign.

What appears to itself in the procession, in the temporary installation of power, in the carnival, is the people as mass, exceeded and in excess, disposable, serial inhabitants of the cosmopolitan slum. It is about presenting to the eyes of power, to oneself as an actor of power, an assumed monstrosity: precariousness, exclusion, indebtedness, non-participation, flouted contribution, but also the indifference of the masters, their cynicism, their obscenity, the violence of repression, the alliance of

power and capital against the real. Make visible the inclusion that excludes. The being in excess, stinging impotence.

Here, the recipient, like the message, is opaque, because the meaning of primitive dispossession is blunted, because oblivion is constitutive of the condition of dispossession. In this respect, occupation is a heuristic of the opacity of the common, where primitive dispossession shows itself to be coded and gives rise to an acrimonious exegesis – utopian machines and neo-Leninist futurity fever, ventriloquist exercises where the intersectional capital of pain is decided, the psychoanalysis of the movement, and especially where we must answer for the collective subject that does not manage to produce the form of its emancipation. Repetition is what blocks memory.

Finally, we must consider this contemporary scenic technique of dispossession that is the blockade. Indigenous barrage, blockades, standoffs, refusing access to traditional territories. The interrupting stage set up on the road to natural resources makes visible the rooted unproductive people, in the process of being uprooted, where the body of the people is standing before the armed emissaries of the nation of wealth accumulation. It works directly in the territory, that of herds of caribou, of firewood, of waterways, of berries, of 32-inch salmon, of foot trips and cartographic chants, this unproductive land from before the capitalist spatio-territorialization, and it engages the living body, the learned body and the eating body, this eternal body which to block the passage places itself in front of trucks whose drivers are equipped with passes issued by judges, and are escorted by police forces.

The message is shockingly clear, so much so that it is hardly audible, so much so that it is not totally assimilable. What is engaged at the indigenous barrage, is the separation of “the producer from the means of production” as such, and therefore the possibility of a relation of pure use to things, the concrete claim of wealth not as value, but as a right. The recipient is also very precisely identified. At the site of the indigenous barrage, the people express to the nation its categorical refusal of economic development itself, that is to say, that there is an unfathomable resistance to primitive dispossession, without productive desire, and without the desire of the state.

This scene, “like a stage, but real”, is in the Artaudian sense the cruellest: this theater is that of the eternal body that exposes itself, exposing the exposure (to hunger, cold, desolation), the very terroristic element of primitive accumulation. The indigenous barrage gives access to the scene of primitive dispossession itself – a scene where the memory that blocks the repetition is played out, a dialectical image where “a flash of the past files itself in the present”. The land that feeds us is taken away from us.

## Learning

These scenes of primitive dispossession, strikes, occupations, barrages, are all practices of messianic visualization of the division between the people and the nation whose operator is the process of primitive accumulation.

From the point of view of subjectivities, Hegelian or Spinozian ruminations, from this spiritualist point of view which fundamentally reifies the effects of capitalism, and which confuses the conditions of acting with the power to act, it has often been said that the division that separates people and nation, that this shared dispossession as it makes itself visible in the practices of resistance, is split, torn, at bay – that this is where the political would be...

And in fact, on the dividing line, conflicts are incessantly played out, which oppose the conservation of gains and futurism, which oppose bureaucrats of emancipation and rebels of the system, where we get worked up with the desire of the state, where one fantasizes the diversion (*détournement*) of the big factory of the real, where the survivalists and the fabulists of the state of nature stare at one another like statues, where the opposition between town and countryside persists and at the same time gets blurred.

Or, it seems to me that the usher of the community of division, of workers, the excluded, the indigenous, must necessarily be thought in their materiality, that is to say together, and that this constitutes the cognitive and empirical work at the threshold of the division between people and nation, despite, or rather including, the subjective disaster that comes through this work. The conflict over the division that makes politics is perhaps at first played out against what we think is the self.

We must think together these apparitions of the division, workers, the excluded, the indigenous, if only because their appearance is synchronic. The indefinite mobilization of productive forces, the advent of the cosmopolitan slum, and the uprooting of earthlings are the synchronic and systemic forms of primitive (performative) dispossession. They happen to us all at the same time, and they happen to us chronically – we live in the same temporality.

These appearances of division must also necessarily be thought together because their insertion into space is played out in a habitable continuum, because there is “only one world” – that of the *khôra* of primitive accumulation, which at the same time produces captive labor, superfluity and uprooting, the ruin that is civilization and which self-operates in the name of the nation and against the people within the frame of the indefinite production of pure value and total waste, and which forms the landscape of all our encounters.

From the point of view of primitive dispossession, strikes, occupations, barrages – always allow one to visit a common plane of existence, whose inscription is not in the future, in utopia, in what there is to be done, but in the past, in this “at-present” of the

past, which is made manifest to us by the practices of resistance, a plane of common existence partaking in a memory of freedom which forbids all subjective identification with the reifications of acting towards a transformation of the real. “Without further reference to the spirit”, writes Guy Lardreau, “matter is that which refuses representation; which cannot be imagined or symbolized”. To think matter while keeping in mind Angela Davis’ invitation, “to become fluent in each other’s stories”.

The only conceivable horizon of an act which forbids itself to be identified with the conditions of acting, and which therefore participates in a messianic commemoration of the primitive common of dispossession, is that of unproductiveness (which henceforth replaces dispossession), de-accumulation, dis-appropriation. As wrote Walter Benjamin quoting Karl Krauss, “the origin is the goal”.