

Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction

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What has not been written on time and space, generally defined as given, distinct, separate essences (or substances)? Up until the modern era, space was generously attributed to the human race, and time to the Lord.

This separation is in the process of being filled in, though more than one lacuna remains. The history of time and the time of history hold another mystery. The genesis of social time remains obscure. The history of time and the time of history should include a history of rhythms, which is missing. There are certain benefits, however. Time is at once fleeting, ungraspable (even for the self of psychology), and grasped, timed, timed *chronometrically*. A philosophical paradox, but one that goes further than philosophy: time, number, and drama concern life. In historical time, what is the role of history in the forms of memory, recollections, narratives? Are there not alternatives to memory and forgetting: periods where the past returns—and periods where the past effaces itself? Perhaps such an alternative would be the rhythm of history...

Capital and Life (The Living)

It has often been said: “Capitalism makes masters and slaves, the rich and the poor, the propertied and the proletariat...” This is not wrong, but it does not suffice for measuring the evil power of *capital*. It constructs and erects itself on a contempt for life and from this foundation: the body, the time of living. Which does not cease to amaze: that a society, a *civilization*, a culture is able to construct itself from such disdain. This leads us to remark:

1. that the disdain conceals itself beneath an ethic (in the moral sense);
2. that it makes up for itself with ornaments: refinements in hygiene, the proliferation of sports and sporting ideology;
3. that if this contempt has played a big role in history, in the foundation of this society (in the nineteenth century, still the so-called Victorian period), and if some of it remains, it is

fading, exhausting itself. It has transformed itself in a way that is subversive and even *revolutionary* in advancing into the unknown: the exaltation of *life*.

The domination-exploitation of human beings begins with animals, wild beasts and cattle; the humans associated with these creatures inaugurated an experience that would turn back against them: killings, stockbreeding, slaughters, sacrifices, and (in order better to submit) castration. All these practices were put to the test and succeeded. The castration of beasts, what power! And what a symbol of anti-nature! *Nature* gave way to representations, to myths and fables. The earth? Those who cultivated it loved it; they treated it as a generous divinity. The living (except those who accepted domestication, such as cats and dogs) provided raw material, a *primary substance* [matière première] that each society treated in its own way.

After which *human beings* separated themselves from each other: on the one hand the masters, men worthy of this name; and on the other, the subhumans, treated like animals, and with the same methods: dominated, exploited, humiliated. Whose fault is this? A bad question. Not that of the animals or their assimilated equivalents. Especially given the progress, the advances that this situation achieved: in knowledge, technology, world exploration, and the mastery of the natural. Man made himself *master* and *possessor of nature*, of the sensible, of substance. It was through this that he divided himself against himself, in realizing himself. Thus did capitalism!

One could, to supplement the concepts with images, depict capital: a chain of bacteria that grabs passing matter, that feeds itself by dividing itself, that multiplies by dividing itself. A false image: bacteria produces the living by absorbing the inert. Meanwhile, capital grows to make the void: it kills things around it on a planetary scale. Both in general and in detail. Capital does not construct. It produces. It does not edify; it reproduces itself. It simulates life. Production and reproduction tend to coincide in the uniform! Traditionally, we take it out on the rich, on the *bourgeois*. Thus the object of action is displaced. We forget that the guilty party is not even money, it is the functioning of capital! Which sublimates concepts. Images do not supplant

concepts; however, in saying *true* or *real*, concepts simplify reality in their own way. Never has a handful of *property owners* dominated the world. There are always associates; they always have numerous auxiliaries with them. Today it is the technocracy, the *specialists* for whom communication relays speech and renders dialogue useless. Plus all those who occupy themselves with *cultural* production, who occupy themselves with things and suchlike. Just as the aristocracy had hordes of vassals, of valets and subjected peasants around it. Without which neither it, nor its reign, nor its society (which otherwise had grandeur, charms, and splendor) could have lasted.

Capital has something more than maliciousness, malignance, and malevolence about it. The wills, the wishes of the property owners are not there for nothing: they execute. Through them, the death-dealing character of capital is accomplished, without there being either full consciousness or a clear intuition of it. It kills nature. It kills the town, turning itself back against its own foundation. It kills artistic creation, creative capacity. It goes as far as threatening the last resource: nature, the fatherland, roots. It delocalizes humans. We adopt technology at the slightest suggestion. Yet technologies do not emerge from the living. Communication? It remains formal, we have seen; content? neglected, lost, wasted away. Technologies kill immediacy (unless the speed of cars, planes, or automatic cameras pass for a return to the immediate; but that isn't saying much). The impact of technological conquests does not make the everyday any more alive; it nourishes ideology.

Yet another paradox, which is to say an affirmation that is at once truthful and unexpected. Capital kills social richness. It produces *private* riches, just as it pushes the *private* individual to the fore, despite it being a public monster. It increases political struggle to the extent that states and state-apparatuses bow down to it. Social richness, however, dates from an earlier time: gardens and (public) parks, squares and avenues, open monumentality, and so forth. Investment in this domain, which is sometimes reliant on democratic pressure, grows rarer. What sets itself up is the empty cage, which can receive any commodity whatsoever, a place of transit, of passage, where the

crowds contemplate themselves (example: the Beaubourg Centre, the Forum in Paris, the Trade Centre in New York). Architecture and the architect, threatened with disappearance, capitulate before the *property developer*, who spends the money.

Like creative pre-capitalist architecture, so-called tribal, which is to say communal, forms of social life have been ruined on a world scale. Without replacement, except by a gestating *socialism*. Capital! The majority of readers of Marx have read this as “The Capitalists,” while the concept designates an entity, a weird being which has a terrible, monstrous existence, both very concrete and very abstract, very efficient and very effective —but which exists through the heads and hands that incarnate it. One could well say: “It’s not their fault... it’s fate! Necessity, in short, the ineluctable!” But this necessity has a name. It is the real, the entity that functions and creates through actors and social and moral relations. The *personalization* of capital, a theoretical error, can lead to practical (political) errors. It would suffice to change the *established* people for society to change. We risk passing over the essential and leaving the functioning of the thing to persist. The thing, which is to say the entity that reifies... Not the object in its usual, empirical and philosophical sense, but the “Thing”... “You are exaggerating! You are allowing yourself to be carried away by your metaphors! Who would you have believe that people, the brave people, you and I, move alongside this legendary monster, this dreadful entity that you describe? No, capital does not sow death! It produces, it stimulates invention...”

Dear speaker, advocate of capital, it is not directly a question of the people. It is not their fault because there is no fault, there is *something* that functions implacably and produces its effects. The brave people, as you said, not only move alongside the monster but are inside it; they live off it. So they do not know how it works. The informational reveals only tiny details and results. Would one of your cells, if it put itself to it, understand your body? These people who moreover move everyday alongside infamous events, great abuses and horrors, find themselves neither horrified nor infuriated by them. They are facts. They were taught that these are simple facts among

many others and so it's fine... The people of our country let themselves play, through their representatives, a role on the world stage that it is better to abstain from qualifying: they let thousands of other brave and simple people of the Third World die of hunger, while here abundance reigns! But do you finally see what the monstrous efficiency of the monster reveals: the situation of the human race, threatened with disappearance, to a large extent unconscious and marching light-heartedly, in quick time to military music along the road of death?

The rhythm that is proper to capital is the rhythm of producing (everything: things, men, people, and so forth) and destroying (through wars, through *progress*, through inventions and brutal interventions, through speculation, and so forth). It is often said: "Yes, it was like this or that in the old days; then the world changed..." This isn't wrong, but it does not go beneath the surface; in fact there were, as we have seen, great rhythms of historical time: apology for the body and following that negation of the body; exaltation of love and pleasure then depreciation and apology for frivolity; taste for and then refusal of violence; and so forth. Capital replaced these alternatives with the conflicting dualities of production and destruction, with increasing priority for the destructive capacity that comes at its peak and is raised to a world scale. Which, on the negative side, therefore plays the determining role in the conception of the world and the worldly.

All this is nothing new; it has been said and re-said. Why repeat it? Because these *truths* or these *ideas* have penetrated badly into consciousness—which consciousness? Social? Philosophical? Political? Let us say immediately, in order to bring the discussion to a close: political. In a way that was unforeseen, over the course of centuries, political consciousness has suffered a decline, though not without leaving its marks. The *social? Socialism?* The socialisms have not yet gained in prestige or in clarity. Perhaps ancient truths will come to pass through a language other than that of the modern, and the position in favor of the social.