

Draft

A Contribution To the Theory of Capitalist Decline, as Evidenced by Changes in the Productive forces within Advanced Capitalist societies.

(The Increasing Role of Labour in the sector of Non-Material Production within Productive labour.)

This essay is based on the following thesis: Firstly, the concept of the decline of capitalism derives from the Essentialist school of philosophy or the Aristotelian tradition; in opposition to atomism (or accidentalism). According to the philosopher Scott Meikle, Karl Marx's was influenced by the Aristotelian tradition from a very early stage.

Secondly, in accordance with essentialist philosophy, we must approach the category of the value form - human labour - in the context of different modes of production, as the motor force of history. These different modes of production, society and history itself, may be regarded as entities or organisms, which undergo necessary change, in accordance with their inherent properties or character; whilst at the same time, the final goal or end of each may be frustrated by accident. In short, the necessary end of history is the epoch of communism, within which it is possible for humanity to realise its fullest potential as homo aestheticus. But it is important to point out that the process of coming-to-be of humanity and society is frustratable anywhere along the line. From a marxist standpoint, the latter concerns

the working class failing to act, or acting with insufficient resolution, at the moment when the opportunity for the necessary social revolution presents itself, which is, of course, necessary for the transition to communism, the final end or telos of human history. A necessary consequence of this failure (once the window of opportunity is finally closed) is the decline of capitalism, and with it, the decline of humanity itself. Instead of the final achievement of human society in the objective sense, society becomes more and more inhuman. Man is increasingly dehumanised by commodity relations; reified consciousness is a concomitant of universalised commodity production; the callous cash nexus begins to seep into every pore of social relations, i.e. extending beyond the productive process itself. Thirdly, the rise of the culture industry and the military-industrial-complex, in the course of the 20th century, the epoch of the domination of finance capital and monopolies or the rule of corporate capital - the highest stage of capitalism - is a necessary consequence of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. In other words, both these phenomena are evidence of a decisive change within the productive forces in advanced capitalist societies. No longer can it be said that the stock market or the culture industry, for example, are the superficial aspects of economic life, whose real substance is the production of raw materials, goods and essential services, such as education and health. All are now a part of the 'real' economy. Today we have banks with shareholders, who are not only determined to make a profit out of other peoples' money; they also make money out of other peoples' debt, e.g. mortgage banks. Henceforth the rule of capital may be characterised as, not merely parasitic, but increasingly cannibalistic upon itself.

What distinguishes the culture industry from art? Under capitalism, art developed as an autonomous activity or special (higher) form of labour; i.e. aesthetic labour, which is also free labour. It is labour as an end-in-itself, which is an essential aspect of human-self-affirmation. At the same time the aesthetic component is divested from the labour process as a whole, which becomes more and more mechanised, rationalised, viz. alienated labour. Unlike art, the latter is no longer a free activity of the spirit, albeit an activity which is realised in material forms.

These maybe functional in the material sense - e.g. church architecture - or functionless - e.g. an 'objet d' art' as an end-in-itself, such as a sculpture, painting, drama, musical composition, novel, etc. Whereas the culture industry has emerged as an adjunct of an increasingly mechanised and rationalised labour process. It is otherwise to be called mass entertainment as a means to an end, which is to make money (Cf. aesthetic activity, art, as an end in itself, which is human self-affirmation). On the one hand, the culture industry relies exclusively on the mass reproducibility of text, sound and images (or a combination of these elements, as in television, film); on the other, in aesthetic terms, of necessity, the dominant tendency is that it reduces quality to quantity, for the sake of a mass market.

Thus we mass produced or commercialised entertainment becomes less and less original and more formulaic in character. It is a reflection of the increasing loss of individuality within the masses themselves under the effects of universal commodity capitalism. To take just one example: the international film industry is now dominated by Hollywood. The latter is dominated, in turn, by the blockbuster,

of which the action-thriller is the most popular form. it sells more seats at the box office than any other kind of film. (N. B. I shall develop these ideas further later in this essay.)

Today the military-industrial-complex (MIC) is much more than the defence industry, as an adjunct of corporate capital. Post 9/11, it now includes high-tech surveillance as part of the 'war on terror'. More importantly, the MIC is an aspect of the privatisation of the bourgeois state, the fomenting of unnecessary wars (such as the Iraq war) in the name of 'national security' and the privatisation of war itself. As Naomi Klein says: the Bush administration, rather than spend its way out of the threat of recession (in classical Keynesian fashion), has decided on a policy whereby the government is hellbent on 'deconstructing itself - hacking off great chunks of the public wealth and feeding them to corporate America, in the form of tax cuts on the one hand and lucrative contracts on the other.' Today the Halliburton Corporation in the USA has contracts to provide uniforms for American soldiers in Iraq, as well as to feed and clothe them. other private corporations, such as Blackwaters have taken on the responsibility of providing security for government officials, resulting in the murder of innocent civilians. For the first time since the Middle Ages, tens of thousands of mercenaries who have a licence to kill in Iraq and Afghanistan, recruited by private security firms like Blackwaters. Furthermore, according to Klein, the catalyst for the wholesale privatisation of government/the privatisation of war is what she calls 'disaster response': First came 9/11; then came Hurricane Katrina. Thus, with regard to the Iraq/ Afghanistan wars, what we are witnessing is a new kind of war profiteering.

(These arguments are based on extracts in the Guardian newspaper from Naomi Klein's latest book, 'The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism', published in September, 2007. I shall be returning to these extracts later in this essay.)

In his book, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx* (1985), Meikle recounts the struggle which developed among the ancient Greeks - between the atomists and Aristotle.

This struggle was 'carefully reviewed by Marx in his Doctoral Dissertation (so he knew all about it). On the one hand, there were Democritus and Epicurus, who believed that reality consisted of atomistic particles which combine and repel in a void; hence for them the driving force of all change is accident. But this makes it difficult to explain the persisting natures of things, such as species and genera.

On the other hand, there was Aristotle, who realised that things could not be explained without recognising the category of form (or essence), because what a thing is, and what things of its kind are, cannot be explained simply in terms of their constituent matter (or atoms).Atomism and essentialism have been fighting it out ever since; forms of essentialism being dominant throughout the Middle Ages; atomism becoming dominant in the 'modern' period of Descartes, Hobbes, Hume and the 18th century mechanists; essentialism reappearing again with Hegel, 19th century idealism and its progeny, including Marx.' The latter, argues Meikle, was an 'unalloyed essentialist, formed and steeped in the study of Aristotle (as well

as Hegel), who expressed the essentialism of his understanding of human history with perfect lucidity in *Capital III*:

‘The specific form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers...reveals the innermost secret of the hidden basis of the entire social structure....Marx regards societies as whole entities or organisms, and the categories he employs for identifying them and the changes they undergo are the Aristotelian categories of essence and form; form and matter (or content); necessary and accidental change; etc.

[Consider] his treatment of the value-form, which is at the heart of Capital. His treatment begins with an essence in embryo, ‘The Elementary of Accidental form of Value’, and proceeds through a series of necessary metamorphoses of the form until it finally universalises itself over the whole of society with the attainment of its final form, capital, where the supply of social labour itself has the value-form thrust upon it. The metamorphoses are necessary, not in being inevitable (they cannot be since accident can frustrate the development), but as being realisations of potentials inherent in the value form itself.’ (See Meikle’s Introduction to his book, pp 8, 9, 10)

It follows, that if we embrace the the Aristotelian tradition, i.e. essentialism, then we must also embrace the concept of emerging, maturing and declining forms, of necessity and in accordance with their natures; albeit accident does have a role to play, but it is not a determining one. This includes the notion of society, which is - in essence - a social organism characterised by the extraction of surplus labour from one class by another; ‘and that accidents and necessities in its history are to

be identified and disentangles with constant reference to essence'. (Meikle, p 8).

Thus we must also extend this essentialist philosophy to include the capitalist form, whose own history can be understood in terms of its emergence, maturing and eventual decline.

Of course, this also raises the possibility of the emergence of a new form - communism - as the telos (or logical end) of history. This conception then raises another important question: If essentialism admits only to the notion that there are both accidents and necessities (in nature, history), then we also have to consider the possibility that the telos of humanity and history may never be achieved.

Finally, if we reject essentialism (as some Marxists do), then we must also reject the concept of capitalism's decline. That leaves us with only two other categorical possibilities: that there is only the accidental or there is only the necessary.

The former would mean that history is nothing more than a 'chapter of accidents'.

That would mean that capitalism itself came about merely by accident. It follows that this is also the only basis for the emergence of a future communist society.

Whereas the latter would mean that if communism is merely necessary (having dismissed the role of accidents in history), then its emergence in the future is logically inevitable. We just have to be patient and accept that everything which has happened, or is about to happen, is for the better. For those marxists who err on the side of optimism - rather than pessimism - and for whom the inevitability of communism is assured, since in the objective sense, it is a logical necessity for humanity, somehow, adequate consciousness ('communist-mass-consciousness') will arise in the future (which never comes).

This is despite the fact that, for now, in every advanced economy, the masses are increasingly in thrall to commodity fetishism and derive adequate distraction for the dehumanising effects of wage labour via the culture industry. At worst they remain blissfully indifferent to the effects of the free market; at best they feel powerless to take action. Hence we are living in an increasingly privatised society. Despite the revolution in technology and the emergence of the cyberspace, this is being achieved by means of a low wage economy, whereby a large minority of workers are forced to do two jobs in order to make ends meet. (Thus we are a long way short of Marx's vision of communist society, in which:

‘...the shortening of the working day is its fundamental premise’. [Thus] communism creates conditions for the growth of culture and art compared to which the limited opportunities that the [wage]slaves’ democracy offers to a privileged few must seem necessarily meagre.’ Here Marx is also alluding to a communist society in which the contradiction between ‘work and pleasure’, between ‘feeling and reason, between the ‘play of bodily and mental powers’ and the ‘conscious will’ ...together with abolition of classes...the gradual disappearance of of the contradiction between physical and spiritual [intellectual] labour [in favour of] the all-sided development of the whole individual which the greatest thinkers could only dream about’. For Marx, therefore, the telos of history is communism and the telos of humanity itself, in both work and play, is homo aestheticus. (See the conclusion to Mikhail Lifshitz's book, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, Pluto press, London, 1974, p 116.)

Rather what we see today, under advanced capitalism, is an increasingly polarised society, in terms of rich and poor. On the one hand, it brings a longer working week for less pay for millions of workers; on the other, unprecedented wealth for the few; e.g. those who own and control private banks, hedge funds, the service industry, etc. The atomised masses, by and large, oppose the current imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; but in the absence of conscription and - as a consequence of the privatisation of war itself - there is no effective anti-war movement, such as that which emerged during the the Vietnam War forty years earlier. Similarly the masses are complacent about, not just global warming, but also the continuing destruction of the environment and their fellow human beings (i.e. the weak and the poor) by a rapacious capitalism.

Furthermore, the optimistic or the 'inevablist' marxist camp is oblivious to Marx's own dismissal of a 'procedural utopia'. Rather Marx originated the idea of 'socialism or barbarism'. Thus he already insisted in 1845-6 that:

'[these] productive forces receive under the system of private property a one-sided development only, and for the majority they become destructive forces. Thus things have now come to such a pass that the individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only to achieve self-activity, but, also, merely to safeguard their very existence.' (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, Vol. 5, p 87. See Istvan Meszaros' book, *The Power of Ideology*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1989, p 34.) Of course, those of us who err on the side of a 'procedural utopia' would be among

the first to point out that Marx wrote the above in the 1840s, shortly after Engel's systematic research into 'the condition of the English working classes' had been published. In his book (of the same name) the latter revealed the true horror of an unregulated industrial capitalism (similar in fact to the modern sweatshops of China and India, etc.). Whilst the condition of today's 'English working classes' is considerably better than that of their predecessors, it should also be pointed out that; given the increasing automation of the productive forces, on the one hand, and the rise of the culture industry, as an integral part of a rationalised production process, on the other, the relentless substitution of quantity for quality in all areas of life, including the cultural sphere, we are also experiencing the pauperisation of the masses in the intellectual, as well as the physical sense of the term. (N.B. Marx is conscious of both forms of pauperisation or 'impoverishment', as he puts it. See his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.)

Finally, it is precisely the optimist or 'inevitabilist' camp within marxism which perpetuates the schism between political economy and cultural criticism within the productive forces (N.B. which, rightly or wrongly, Adorno was accused of at an earlier time). This is because these marxists are reluctant to entertain the idea of a political economy of culture, within which Adorno's theory of the 'culture industry' is a key concept; since it is a major cause of false consciousness and mass passivity in contemporary society. (Cf. the theory that the passivity of the masses today is determined solely by the iron rule of capital over labour, the emasculation of the trades unions and so on; i.e. today's workers are afraid of being dismissed if they take direct action, which can only lead to their further pauperisation, etc.)

Essentialism and the productive Forces

It follows that human social labour is the essence of all socio-historic forms (classical society, feudalism, capitalism, etc.) These forms have cohered as social organisms, because each has a nature, which develops with necessity along a certain line, unless it is frustrated - dramatically - by accident. Furthermore the development of this fundamental essence (human social labour) is the historical process, whose telos (or logical end) is communism (a society of freely associated producers). Communism is the fullest realisation of the potential of human society. It is, at the same time, for man, the first real emergence, the realisation of his essence - human potential as something real. The realised human society is a society of realised human beings. But the telos of humanity is frustratable anywhere along the line. It can be frustrated, for example, by the working class - as the historical bearer of the new society (communism) - failing to act or acting with insufficient resolution; even though the conditions are ripe for the necessary social revolution and transition to communism, i.e. once the capitalist system has developed to a mature stage and has a global reach.

The key to this transition to communism is the achievement of 'communist mass-consciousness'. This presupposes that the mass of humanity, in particular the working class, is able to overcome human alienation (commonly known as 'false consciousness'), which is a necessary product of wage labour and the achievement of universal commodity production, as well as commodity fetishism, which is, in turn, a necessary product of commodity production; (viz, individual workers

substitute the social relation of things for their own social labour, whilst they also see their own labour and their relations with their fellows as mere things, objects, commodities in fact.) The alienation of wage labour....

History, therefore, is the process of coming-to-be of human society (and its possible passing away - or decline - into an inhuman society. (See Meszaros in *POI* re this point, p 34...)

My second premise is that the productive forces include, first and foremost, human social labour and the means to produce all those material objects necessary to sustain life, such as the production of food, clothing, shelter and technology which enables man to improve the quality of his life. But they also include the production of non-material commodities (e.g. education, as well as propaganda, entertainment). These non-material commodities may also be considered as aspects of man's spiritual (intellectual) life, including those which may be dehumanising in their effect. (Here I am referring to chauvinism, jingoism, xenophobia against foreigners, especially immigrants, pornography, etc. I have not mentioned racism, sexism and homophobia, not because these ideologies have been successfully overcome by an enlightened capitalism; but because they have been forced underground by a new ideology, i.e. 'political correctness'.) Therefore the productive forces include those which are destructive in the spiritual sense, simply because they are dehumanising in their effects. Secondly the productive forces also include the means for the production of material commodities which are destructive of man in the physical sense - simply because their direct purpose is to

maintain and destroy life. Obviously, in the context of the present, here I am referring to the armaments industry or the military industrial complex. (The latter involves a relationship between the state, as the source of demand, and the private sector as the source of supply, a relationship which is now undergoing dramatic change, as we shall see.)

In advanced capitalist societies, the continuing expansion of both the culture industry and the military-industrial complex must be seen in this context. I would also argue that both these two aspects of the productive forces grew enormously in importance in the second half of the 20th century and continue to play a dominant role in bourgeois political economy. Further, this fact, i.e. the unprecedented growth of the productive forces in this area, is a symptom of the decline of the capitalist system itself. I say this for two reasons: Firstly, on the one hand, it is a necessary development to alleviate over-production of all commodities, given the constant revolutionising of the production process. On the other hand, we still have a great mass of impoverished people, especially in third world countries, such as much of Africa, large areas of the former Soviet Union, central China, etc., who are still too poor to consume all the available products which enter the market. Therefore the inevitable consequence of capitalist over-production is a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Thus the capitalist class is desperately seeking new ways to stop this from happening.

The present financial instability in world markets points to one way of addressing this fundamental contradiction within capitalism: Yesterday the first principle of international finance was that it should base itself on sound investment, preferably in government bonds or limited companies, which have the confidence of sensible shareholders, to whom the company is answerable at the annual general meeting. Today we have 'new-age' companies, who are so greedy for profit that they are prepared to take high risks, which are unprecedented in the history of capitalism. Sooner or later the bubble will burst. This is what happened with the recent collapse of the Northern Rock Bank in the UK. Unlike its illustrious predecessors, this bank indulged in high-risk speculation in the money markets, as a means to offer its shareholders and individual savers the highest rates of return for their investments. As long as the financial markets remained bouyant, the bank was able to satisfy both its customers and the share-holders. But the bank spun into a deep crisis when the markets suddenly became uncertain. As a result, all banks and finance companies have stopped lending money to each other, and the markets are in danger of drying up. When that happens, of course, the whole capitalist system goes into crisis, resulting in the collapse of trading in goods and services and mass unemployment; i.e. a re-run of 1929.

The afore-mentioned uncertainty was a consequence of the collapse of the largest mortgage company in the United States a few weeks earlier. It collapsed for the same reason: heavy speculation by the international financial markets, albeit based on high-risk investment for maximum profits. In this case, they were willing to put their money into a hedge fund which was willing to lend money in turn to high-risk

borrowers - low income earners who have bought into the property market.

Unfortunately they have swallowed the promise of the free-marketeers that, in a deregulated, privatised economy, everyman and woman should be able to own their own home. But when the US Federal Bank raised interest rates in order to dampen down the biggest deficit economy in world history, millions of people were suddenly forced to default on their mortgage payments. It would appear that the present economic boom experienced by the most advanced capitalist societies is like the proverbial house built on sand!

However there are other ways, which have a much longer history, whereby the capitalist class hopes to alleviate alleviate the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Paradoxically, this outlet for surplus capital came about as a result of two world wars. Both the 1914-18 War and the 1939-45 War acted as a catalyst for a new technological revolution. This took the form of the rise of modern mass production, including the mass reproducibility of sound and images, as well as text. Therefore here we are not just talking about the mass production of material goods, be they cars or tanks, but also services, including mass entertainment ; concretely the age of the Ford motor car; the Douglas passenger plane, later the prototype for American warplanes; 'tin-pan alley' and Hollywood. In a word, on the one hand, we are talking about the rise of the 'culture industry' (first coined in the 1940s by the culture critic, Theodor Adorno) and the 'military-industrial-complex' (first used by President Eisenhower at the end of the 1950s). Arguably, the United States has fomented wars in order to stimulate the military-industrial complex on more than

one occasion since the end of the Second World War, e.g. the Korean War in 1950 and the Vietnam War in 1965; albeit in defence of democracy against the 'communist threat'.

Today, however, America's preponderance to start further imperialist wars, such as the Gulf War of 1991 and the present war in Iraq, has taken on a new and frightening dimension - Now war has to be waged - both at home and abroad - as an integral part of 'the war on terror'. Contemporary US politics is driven by the fear factor. Hence the Bush administration is able to wage war on the enemy within, by means of the Patriots Act (a serious attack on American Civil liberties) and the enemy without, the so-called axis of evil, with Iran at its centre. Despite the chaos that the United States has unleashed following the botched invasion of Iraq in 2003, which is becoming an even deeper mire, throughout 2007, we have been hearing noises from the White House that an attack on Iran is 'imminent'.

Nevertheless, and to return to my main point, the rise of the culture industry and the military-industrial-complex are both central to changes in the productive forces, as well as being symptomatic of the decline of capital itself. Moreover, and most importantly, it is my contention that these changes in the productive forces within advanced capitalist societies also threaten the decline of humanity itself as a species-being; i.e. without the overthrow of capitalism and the achievement of a communist society, humanity has been unable to achieve the fullest realisation of the potential of human society, because capitalist increasingly prevents us all from becoming fully realised human beings. Indeed humanity is becoming more and

more fragmented in the spiritual (intellectual) sense; universal commodity capitalism turns quality into quantity; humanity is in danger of losing its individuality altogether. Thus we should also contemplate the notion that the decline of capitalism also includes the decline of humanity itself. Hence the the struggle to defend and to revive the ideas of Marx becomes more important than ever.

A New approach

This paper also arises out of more immediate considerations: I am only too well aware that my preoccupation with the rise of the ‘culture industry’ in the 20th century has produced much criticism from other marxists. Unfortunately for me, most of this criticism is thus far deserved. It arises from a fundamental error on my part: Hitherto I have made a separation between political economy and cultural factors. Understandably this has produced an adverse reaction, especially those marxists who stand four-square behind the banner of Marx’s critique of bourgeois political economy - in opposition to 20th century ‘revisionist’ marxist cultural critics, especially those who are unashamedly influenced by the critical theory tradition, associated with Theodor Adorno (leader of the postwar Frankfurt School until his death in 1969) and more recently Guy Debord (Situationist, author of *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967). I include myself in this second group. At the same time, I would argue that anyone concerned with culture (in all its forms) and its relationship to class consciousness is not necessarily a revisionist!

To remedy this situation, I have come to the realisation that it is quite wrong to set up a dichotomy between political economy and cultural issues. This is a false dichotomy.

Hence in this new paper, I have adopted the opposite approach: I shall now begin with the premise that both political economy and cultural issues have a common denominator. This may be explained as follows: To paraphrase Marx in *Capital I*, Vol. 16, although modern capitalist production is characterised by the production of commodities; albeit on a universal scale (i.e. nothing escapes commodification, ‘all that is sold melts into air; all that is holy is profaned’); in essence it is still the same capitalist form, whose purpose is the production of surplus value. By so doing I am indebted to the work of the Russian political economist, I. I. Rubin. I refer, in particular, to his book, written in the 1920s: *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*; notably the final chapter on *Productive Labour*. (Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1982) In his introduction to this, his last essay, Rubin begins with an interpretation of Marx’s *Theories of Productive and Unproductive Labour* (Volume I, *Theories of Surplus Value*).

Rubin explains that when we consider the role of the labourer in the production of surplus value, this also includes labour outside the sphere of material objects; e.g. in the educational and cultural spheres. He cites as examples, a schoolmaster, an actor and even a clown! Today, we could add the artist-businessman (such as Damien Hurst and Tracy Emin); as well as popular singers, blockbuster film-makers, writers for television, etc., who work within the entertainment industry.

Marx is at pains to point out that the definition of productive labour is not to be equated with the material characteristics of labour (neither from the nature of the product nor from the particular character of the labour as concrete labour). Rather productive labour derives from ‘the definite social form, the social relations of production, within which labour is realised.’ (*Theories of Surplus Value*, p 153) That is its material aspect. Therefore, Marx continues, ‘the distinction between productive and unproductive labour has nothing to do...with the particular speciality of the labour or with the particular use-value in which this special labour is incorporated.’ (ibid, p 156) It follows that, ‘from a material standpoint, one and the same labour is productive or unproductive (i.e. included or not included in the capitalist system of production) depending on whether or not it is organised in the form of a capitalistic enterprise.’ (My italics) ‘For example, the workman employed by a piano maker is a *productive labourer*.

His labour not only replaces the wages that he consumes, but in the product, the piano, the commodity which the piano-maker sells, there is a surplus value over and above the value of the wages. But assume on the contrary that I buy all the materials required for a piano..., and that instead of buying the piano in a shop I have it made in my house. The workman who makes my piano is now an *unproductive labourer*, because his labour is exchanged directly against my revenue. (ibid, p 156) In the first case, the worker who produces the piano is included in a capitalist enterprise and thus in a system of capitalist production. In the second case he is not.’

This distinction applies particularly to the sphere of cultural production. Marx gives the now famous example of the 17th century poet, John Milton: ‘...Milton who wrote ‘Paradise Lost’ for £5, was an *unproductive labourer*. On the other hand, the writer who turns out stuff for his publisher in factory style, is a *productive labourer*... Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It was an activity of his nature. later he sold the product for £5. But the literary proletarian of Leipzig, who fabricates books...under the direction of his publisher, is a *productive labourer*; for his product is from the outset subsumed under capital, and comes into being only for the purpose of increasing that capital. A singer who sells her song for her own account is an *unproductive labourer*. But the same singer commissioned by an entrepreneur to sing in order to make money is a *productive labourer*; for she produces capital.’ (ibid, p 389)

The kernel of my argument is that capital is increasingly dependent on this form of productive labour, as a means to alleviate over-production of material goods, which is, in turn, responsible for the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in advanced capitalist societies. In other words we are talking about the subsumption of creative or aesthetic labour, either wholly or in part, to the needs of capital; in simple terms, to make money for the capitalist. At the same time, and as a necessary consequence, we see a ‘dumbing down’ of artistic labour itself. It is the correlate of the growing need for capital to rely on the military-industrial complex, which has continued to grow at an unprecedented rate as a result of the Second World War and subsequently during the Cold War period and into the 21st century.

This leads us back again to the present, concretely the wars now being waged by American imperialism and a diminishing 'coalition of the willing', most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Related to this is the rise of Israel, a country whose very existence is based on conquest and, of necessity, permanent aggression against its Arab neighbours, as a major player in terms of the military-industrial complex. (N.B. Today Israel is a major exporter of related technology, e.g. for surveillance purposes, to its parent imperialist state, the USA. Increasingly the American imperialist 'watchdog' in the Middle East is straining to break free of its leash and become a regional power in its own right; even an imperialist one, in the modern sense, i.e. as an exporter of hi-tech weaponry.) On the other hand, China and India are fast-rising capitalist economies; reservoirs of investment and suppliers of cheap labour and products, made under licence for US and Japanese corporations and which are currently flooding the American domestic market, etc.

At the same time these superpowers of tomorrow are already beginning to challenge American power, which is in decline. Arguably, the former are also developing their own alternative forms of the productive forces (as outlined above); i.e. a military-industrial complex, on the one hand, as well as a home-grown culture industry, on the other (e.g. Bollywood); albeit at a much earlier stage than the USA. (N.B. Industrial capitalism in the United States got under way in the early 19th century. But it was not until roughly 100 years later that US capitalism turned to these alternative forms of productive forces.) To conclude this

section, the military-industrial complex acts as a motor force for imperialist aggression and war in general. (of course, we cannot ignore, either, that the trigger for such wars is always political and has a specific character.)

Furthermore, I would argue that the changing nature of the productive forces (above) is symptomatic of the decline of American capitalism and of the capitalist system as a whole. Sooner rather than later, the emerging capitalist powers will display the same symptoms in the course of their development. As for the culture industry, not only has this played a major part in the rise of mass consumerism or the unprecedented expansion of commodity fetishism, which, so far, knows no end; not only does it operate as a major distraction for the masses, caught up in stultifying wage-labour in its modern form; not only does it help alleviate the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (along with the military-industrial complex). More importantly, the more the creative and aesthetic aspect of labour in general, and art in particular, are subsumed by capital, then Hegel and Marx's doctrine of the inevitable decay of art under capitalism is already upon us. One way to define the human species form and the realisation of its specific potential (which is clearly evident throughout Marx's entire oeuvre, that is, in the form of his many aesthetic asides, e.g. in *Theories of Surplus Value*, above) is humanity's self-realisation of its species potential, through labour, as *homo aestheticus*. Thus the more humanity fails to realise its species potential under the rule of capital, then it could be argued, the more dehumanised humanity becomes. The achievement of mankind's species potential, of course, requires the achievement of a communist organisation of

society. Therefore if capitalism is not overthrown, it begins to enter the phase of its own decline or 'passing away'. Finally, if capitalism is not overthrown by the social revolution envisaged by Marx, this also entails the decline of humanity itself as a species-being.

Here, I think, is where the work of Adorno comes in. To be fair to him, he may never have argued the above as explicitly as I am doing 40 years after his death. But equally, I would argue that this notion is inherent in his own work. In an article about popular music, for example, written in 1940, he pointed out that 'commercial entertainment in capitalist society is [now] the correlate of the mechanised and rationalised labour process.' Therefore, he is making a distinction between 'autonomous' art or art which is freely produced (in so far as that is possible) and 'popular' culture. Apropos the latter, he insisted that it is part of the modern 'culture industry'. He rejected the term 'mass culture' on the grounds that this an 'illusory suggestion of spontaneous popularity'. Adorno is referring to the fact that once creative or aesthetic labour, such as the art of singing (even for one's supper!) becomes part of commercial entertainment, it becomes a part of the industrial process. The 'artist' is now compelled to compose for a particular market. He has to create a certain product within a given time. His art is quantified from the word go, and so on.

Therefore, in the creative or aesthetic sense. such 'art' is anything but spontaneous, Arguably, such a work is less likely to be art, because, first and foremost, it must function as an entertainment. Art, of course, can be very successful, precisely

because it is entertaining. But it must also be creative in terms of its form. Indeed in order to be described as ‘good’ or ‘great’, even as a ‘masterpiece’, as something which will undoubtedly endure over generations, a work of art must be beautiful in both form and content. It must appeal to one’s emotions and be thought-provoking at the same time. Given the division of labour within capitalist society, in particular, the division between intellectual and practical labour, it is still possible that commercialised art may achieve some or all of these qualities; but only if it is able to reach a mass market. Commercial success, the ability of the artistic product to make a profit, is the first priority. Therefore, usually, for the sake of a mass audience, the qualities of form and content to which I have alluded, are not present. Marx himself went so far as to describe such ‘art’ as ‘commercialised trash’....

2010