

Order of Sophianic Marxists

Marx, the Alchemist



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What a great miracle is Man, O Asclepius, a being worthy of reverence and honor. For he passes into the nature of a god as though he were himself a god.

– Hermes Trismegistus, “To Asclepius,”
Corpus Hermeticum

The Lenin-Nag Hammadi Library

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro describes his *Cannibal Metaphysics* as a “beginner’s guide” to a nonexistent work he’d long imagined titled *Anti-Narcissus*. When it comes to writing commentary on “invisible” works, Viveiros de Castro claims direct descent from “that great blind reader,” Borges.¹ We, in turn, would like to jump on the coattails of this hastily sketched-out tradition and offer up an expansive commentary on a corpus of imagined manuscripts recently unearthed at the Moscow Center for Socio-Political History. Apparently, sometime around 1938, the Amsterdam-based International Institute for Social History (IISH) acquired these manuscripts from an exiled member of the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany). At the end of the Second World War, some of the IISH’s holdings fell into the hands of the Soviet occupying forces and were subsequently removed to the USSR, ending up in the special collection of the Institute for Marxism-Leninism

(IML). The IML was disbanded in 1991, and its library now operates as an independent entity, known since 2014 as the Center for Socio-Political History (CSPH). We met a former associate of the CSPH in the smoking room of the Lenin Library, where he first told us the story of these manuscripts and explained that upon their discovery, he promptly left the library with them in hand. The manuscripts had been cataloged under some innocuous headings; their contents vague. Our new friend was clever and knew the library system inside out: their disappearance went unnoticed.

Admittedly, we listened to his story with some skepticism. Our new friend was obsessed with Ancient Egypt and made daily pilgrimages to the nearby Pushkin Museum to look at sarcophagi. When he heard that we were working on a history of the Leftist movement in Russia, he explained that his discovery was equivalent to the “Nag Hammadi library” of Marxism and had the potential to revolutionize our understanding of Marxist philosophy.²

The next time we met, he brought along the manuscripts: these were old, handwritten scraps of paper filled with fragmentary and – at first glance – esoteric writing. It was difficult to see what it all had to do with Marxism. Our interlocutor, however, explained that this was Marxism itself – its very essence, which must be grasped if we meant to discover the extent of its mythological power. He gave us a typewritten copy of one fragment – this, he claimed, was the key text of the Marxist Nag Hammadi: a previously unknown manuscript by Marx himself. We append it below:

Humanity’s Magnum Opus, or a brief description of the Magisterium, compiled by the Adept Karl Marx for Sons of the Great Art, who shall comprehend his revelation and gain through it the means to accomplish the transmutation of metals and compounding of universal medicines, having attained universal well-being.

Prima materia, or the *Quintessence*, is the *Gemeinwesen* or universal generic essence of humanity. It is found everywhere, including within oneself, but in impure form – as human labor in the *Wertform*. You may marvel at this, but you are already in possession of the Stone. You have even begun to purify it through a succession of unconscious experiments, in the following manner.

In the beginning, at the stage of *nigredo*, or

black work, you realized the first *Coniunctio*, or Sacred Marriage. For this to occur, the Quintessence or the fifth element in the form of concrete human labor began to interact with the other four elements of the material world. This resulted in the creation of use value. In the second phase, *albedo*, use values entered into exchange. Circulation became a colossal *alchymistische Retorte der Cirkulation* (a huge social alembic), wherein *prima materia* underwent a series of transmutations, thus effecting the evolution of forms of value. Concurrently, the *Geldkristall* (money crystal) was formed, the most evolved form of value. But many had forgotten that it was merely a sign, indicating that the adept is on the right path.

Prima materia is almost completely purified, but this is yet to be recognized by the one who has affected all these transmutations: collective mankind. The adept is in thrall to false ideas and fetishism, unable to see at the heart of commodities the *prima materia* that he himself had deposited there. Here begins the new phase, *citrinitas*, which requires a full awareness of what you had previously attained through rather chaotic experimentation: for transmutation of matter is inseparable from the transfiguration of consciousness. Procure knowledge with the help of the philosopher’s *alkahest* (universal solvent): critical theory.

Begin your analysis with an understanding of the dual nature of the commodity. This is the most difficult moment of consciousness, when alchemical torment, or “the division of the monad,” occurs. It is a splitting of the one (commodity) into King and Queen, sulfur and mercury (use value and exchange value). Make use of geometry: observe the form of the commodity as an ellipse – a figure between two foci, whose eccentricity is the internal contradiction of the commodity between use value and exchange value. The movement of a point along the arc of the ellipse is at once a fall toward its divided center and a moving away from it, corresponding to the constant metamorphosis of the commodity.

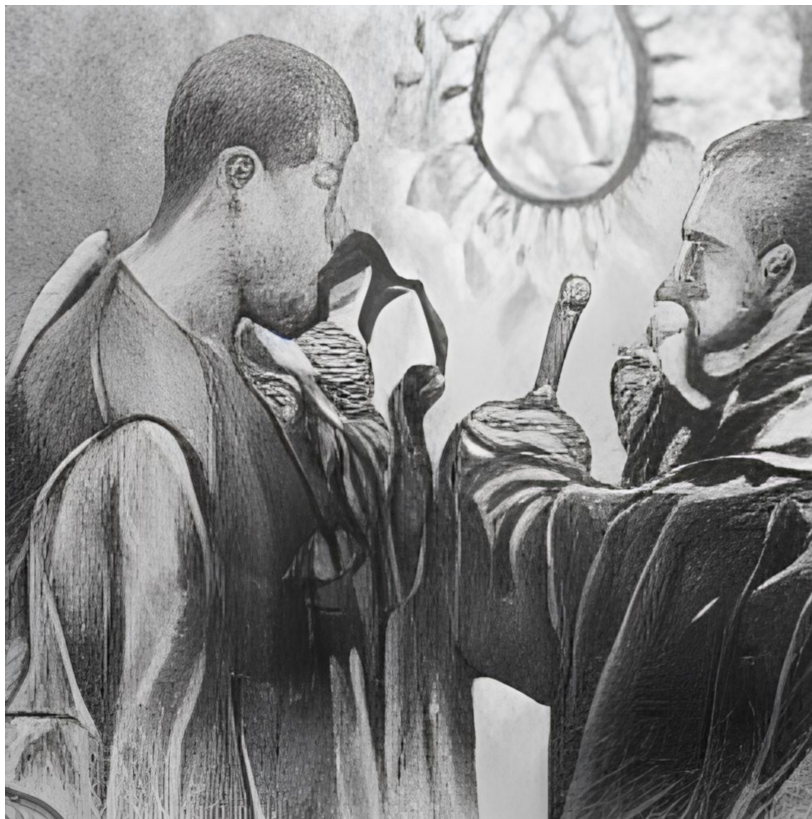
This most difficult moment is concluded with the new, more perfect marriage of King and Queen, the gnostic syzygy in the form of the commodity, already deconstructed, yet united in a new critical whole. The alchemical triad of mercury, sulfur, and salt exists as exchange value, use value, and the principle of the commodity. After all, mercury and sulfur can only form solid substances in the presence of a fixative (salt), and in our case the fixative is the commodity form or the very principle of the commodity. Now you are left with something more than the commodity: you now possess the divine hermaphrodite *Werth* (Value). One half of it is the *Werthkristall*, the substance of value, the crystals of abstract human labor (*Gallerte*); and the other half is use value.

You have accomplished much. But your androgyne is not Royal yet, since it is held captive by the homunculus Capital – this improper demiurgic ruler – and pressed into its service. In effecting the Magisterium, mankind has involuntarily created the *beseeltes Ungeheuer* (animated

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monster), the self-powered substance endowed with the actual power to create value because it is itself value. This is dead labor, which constantly increases itself by annexing the living ferment of the labor force to the dead elements of commodity formation. People do not see that this monster is merely a homunculus, they do not understand that the power of money is merely the power of *prima materia* crystalized therein.

But the Great Work must continue as philosophical work and political struggle. The author of this text, Artist and Philosopher,³ has accomplished great work and assumes the role of a prophet for future times. In the words of Eirenaeus Philalethes, “Elias, the Artist, is already born, and now glorious things are declared of the City of God.” Now comes the final phase of the Magisterium: the *rubedo*, or red work. It has its own *nigredo* – the extreme abasement of the proletariat and the rousing of its internal fire with the help of critical theory. Fire appears on the black sphere. After which, the proletariat, and all



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of humanity along with it, transmutes itself into the red lion that has swallowed the sun!

Alchemy as Dual-Nondual Anthropology and Antiauthoritarian Praxis

The document before us is an alchemical treatise, supposedly written by Marx himself. In it, the emergence of the value form, the proletarian revolution, and Marxist theory are recast as the alchemical Magnum Opus, using the terminology of alchemical praxis, as if it were some treatise by Paracelsus. It is, in other words, a structural translation of one discourse into another, preserving the logic of both. The result seems fairly consistent, as if we were dealing with a case of *reverse anthropology*, to borrow a term coined by the anthropologist Roy Wagner. An example Wagner gives of this phenomenon is the “cargo cult,” where an indigenous people adapt products of Western civilization into their cosmogony (an act that the Westerner naturally finds absurd). This, indeed, is the aim of progressive anthropology: to assume a different *perspective* and see one’s own culture as something no longer recognizable; to free oneself, however briefly, from one’s own philosophy, or the “stifling bedroom of the Same” (Viveiros de Castro).⁴ This happens when “the classified becomes the classifier.” In our case, it is not the Marxist who translates the alchemist’s system into his own cultural conventions, but vice versa. Marxist praxis is presented as alchemical in essence. To understand this better, let us attempt a partial back-translation of the pseudo-Marx treatise into more conventional terms. But first, we must speak to the alternative meaning of alchemy and consider the validity of mixing alchemy and Marxism.

Alchemy, as we know, is the praxis of the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition. The larger esoteric and mystical tradition, which emerged somewhere in Roman Egypt in the first centuries of the common era, runs through two thousand years of history up to our present as a kind of underbelly or occult side of European (more broadly, Eurasian) thought and art. It has resurfaced in countless guises and incarnations, notably as the Kabbala, Swabian Pietism, Hegelian philosophy, Russian religious philosophy, and Russian cosmism. The essence of the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition is that it is dual-nondual: i.e., it can distinguish between God, human beings, and the world, while simultaneously asserting that all three are modalities of the same thing, and that it is humanity’s objective to surmount these permeable boundaries. This is where the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition diverges subversively

and radically from the conventional, officially sanctioned religious movements of various eras, particularly European Christianity. The latter posits an insurmountable chasm between God and man, Creator and creature, and the correlative indelible duality, wherein the transcendent will always remain superior to the immanent. Needless to say, this state of affairs offers a convenient template for earthly power: rulers and the official church, i.e., representatives of the indelibly transcendent God on earth, will always remain in a superior position vis-à-vis their subjects. In institutional, conventional Christianity, the gap between the authorities and the people is as insurmountable and ontological as that between God and creation.

The Gnostic/Hermetic tradition undermines this position. It posits man as dualistic in nature, comprising the natural and the divine principles. His objective is to escape from the lowest or “fallen” world of the sidereal, demiurgical, or material determination. Aided by his imagination (understood as a function of the mind rather than binary reason, or, in Hegel’s terms, of *Vernunft* rather than *Verstand*), he is able to climb the unbroken chromatic ladder toward a union with the One (Absolute), i.e., until he himself becomes the Universal or God. In the run-up to this, the One is unfolding, emanating, or progressing into the world and as the world. When the lower limit is reached, the Recovery of the produced to the producing begins, and progress is displaced by *epistrophe*: this is the Gnostic/Hermetic Resurrection, Renaissance, or Revolution. In Hermetics, rebirth is wholly contingent on man’s inner abilities: this, indeed, is the principal idea behind the Hermetic state, i.e., the tightly sealed flask, the alchemical alembic, the human skull as the container of thought. Only in a *vas hermetica* can transfiguration of consciousness and transmutation of matter take place, two processes which are interdependent and interchangeable, as, indeed, we learn from the *Tábula Smaragdina* of Hermes Trismegistus: “as above, so below” or as within, so without. Omnipotence, immortality, consciousness of one’s divine nature are fully within man’s grasp, but to attain these he must put in the work, i.e., take up alchemical praxis at the interchangeable levels of transformation of matter and of consciousness.

Marx and the Gnostic/Hermetic Tradition (a Qualification)

Gnostic variations of the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition go even further in pointing up the struggle against officialdom: the world of matter and determination is said to be in the hands of the Demiurge and the archons, malicious and

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imperfect Rulers. The divine component in man, however, stands above this world, and its task is to turn the world upside down, destroy the inferior determination of the false lower gods/rulers and, in effecting the revolution, attain freedom in the consciousness of one's potency. Whose words are these? Do they belong to the Gnostic tradition or do they form the core of Marxist theory? Our answer is: both. It is not our purpose here to show the connections between Marx's ideas and the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition: others have done this admirably on numerous occasions.⁵ We note in particular the works of Cyril Smith, as well as Glenn Alexander Magee's recent work on Hegel as a Hermetic philosopher and Erica Lagalisse's studies on the occult underpinnings of antiauthoritarian movements. At the same time, the act of bringing together Marxist philosophy and the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition may still come as a shock. This could be because there is still no major publication titled "Karl Marx and the Gnostic-Hermetic Tradition." If so, the following pages may be read as either commentary on this invisible book or its opening pages. Here the reverse anthropology of the manuscript by the pseudo-Marx-chemist becomes a direct anthropology and genealogy of Marxism. The core concepts of Marxism may, at least, be examined organically within Gnostic/Hermetic philosophy and, at most, are in fact its specific avatar, a Gnostic/Hermetic myth actualized in a new guise at the intersection of being and becoming, like any (eternally) recurring myth.

Do such efforts constitute revisionism? Not in our view, since they do nothing to diminish the force of Marxism's revolutionary positions. On the contrary: they affirm and strengthen them in a different cultural language, ground Marx's philosophy in older traditions, and restore to Marxism the mighty, transformative power of the imagination – a gesture increasingly demanded in our time by the truly progressive "new" Marxists, such as Andy Merrifield and Vladislav Sofronov. Additionally, everything that follows is a project of Sophianic Marxism, one of the "newest" Marxisms, destined to rejuvenate this mighty philosophy in the postcolonial space of reverse anthropologies and alternative cosmologies. The term "sophianic" derives from Sophiology, a notable part of Russian religious philosophy that promotes all-unity, which is realized through a ubiquitous and androgynous *anima Mundi* (world soul). By aligning sophianic all-unity with Marx's notion of *Gemeinwesen* as the collective human essence, we place Sophianic Marxism at the fertile intersection between Marx's thought and Russian religious philosophy, the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition, and Eurasian esotericism in general. In the past few

years our Order has been at work on a Russian analogy to Merrifield's "magical Marxism," which is an attempt to restore Marxism to its original power of the imagination. It is time to publish our preliminary results.

***Selbstbetätigung* – Self-Actualization – as Humanity's Magnum Opus**

The core of Marx's philosophy – which, put another way, coincides with the core of Gnostic Hermeticism – is the central place given to humanity's self-activity or self-actualization. Marx (and Hermeticists generally) construes the act of perfection as man's task, his work. The seventeen-year-old Marx writes, "To man, too, the Deity gave a general aim, that of ennobling mankind and himself, but he left it to man to seek the means by which this aim can be achieved."⁶

From the very outset, moreover, this perfection is not individual, but general, universal. This, once more, tracks perfectly with the objective of Gnostic/Hermetic praxis: the achievement of the state of all-oneness or all-unity, when the One, having unfolded through progress into All (the World), undergoes the revolutionary return to the One. In Hermetics, all-oneness is the starting and the end point of the dialectical triad of cosmogony: unity-progress-*epistrophe*. To be sure, Marx "flattens out" all-unity on earth (effectively standing Hegel's Hermeticism "upside down"), but the original idea of all-unity as man's universal objective remains unchanged:

The chief guide which must direct us in the choice of a profession is the welfare of mankind and our own perfection. It should not be thought that these two interests could be in conflict, that one would have to destroy the other; on the contrary, man's nature is so constituted that he can attain his own perfection only by working for the perfection, for the good, of his fellow men.⁷

The true essence of man – in the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition,⁸ as well as in Marx – is not his "fallen" actual determined state, but the free Anthropos, the Man-God. Marx uses the term *Gemeinwesen* to denote authentic human nature, i.e., man's all-unity, or in the language of Russian religious philosophy, his *sobornost'* (fellowship). Therefore, according to Marx, right and true universal law – as a realization of man's inner essence, unconstrained in some coercive and unnatural manner – is something that for the time being exists only potentially, at once as essence and as horizon line. In earlier social formations we find only "customs contrary to right," when "human history was part of natural

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history, and in which, according to Egyptian legend, all gods concealed themselves in the shape of animals ... For whereas human law is the mode of existence of freedom, this animal law is the mode of existence of unfreedom.”⁹

Similarly, the Gnostic tradition recognizes the authentic man as inner essence (hence our term “esoteric,” i.e., “internal,” and the Arabic “نطابلا” (*batin*) or “hidden” in Shiite Gnostic mysticism). This essence must be accessed through the intensive process of becoming one’s nondual twin.¹⁰ of distinction,” arising as intensities in the nondual chromatism of becoming. In Hermeticism, the intensive pairs or syzygies operate, on the one hand, as tensioned strings, between which becoming is realized – i.e., they act as attractors of the process – and on the other as generators of multiplicity, as assurance that the world is multiform and exists generally – i.e., the One progresses into the world and as the world by virtue of the generation of differences, organized into androgynous intensive pairs. So too man exists, on the one hand, as Anthropos – Aeon of the fourth syzygy – in essence, God and his emanation, and on the other, as earthly man – a creature of dual (at once spiritual and material) nature. One of them is free from determination

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and is spiritual, while the other remains in the process of declining/becoming. The link between the two modes of human existence ensures that earthly man, in all his individualized multiplicity, will come together as Purusha, Adam Kadmon, or Anthropos, the Man-God. This transition occurs as inner intensity.] In actuality, the spiritual substance of the world is weighed down by determination, the “punishments of matter.” According to Marx, in every age man is granted only his false, counterfeit, or polluted “natural unity,” e.g., in the form of religion or capital (i.e., Demiurge and the false deities of the lowest world): “this *abject materialism*, this sin against the holy spirit of the people and humanity.”¹¹

Anthropos exists in the world in a profaned state: “In the literal sense of the word people are put in separate boxes (*Kasten*), and the noble, freely interchanging members of the great sacred body, the holy Humanus, are sawn and cleft asunder, forcibly torn apart.”¹² Consequently, according to Marx, man’s essence as universality (*Gemeinwesen*) demands realization and purification: it is at once given (as the fallen, dismembered holy Humanus) and posited (as the reassembled and purified Anthropos).

Selbstbetätigung is self-actuation, self-governance, self-launch, self-activation, self-



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arousal, self-realization. This mercurial, shape-shifting term first appears in Marx as *Selbsttätigkeit* (self-activity) in the first article of the “Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly,” where Marx, in best proto-Jungian tradition, describes the process of self-activity’s projection into the world and its consequent alienation, when self-activity begins to be perceived as the activity of another: “The functioning of the state, which primarily expresses the *self-activity* of the individual provinces, takes place without their *formal* co-operation, without their joint *knowledge*; it is a senseless contradiction that my self-activity should consist of acts unknown to me and done by another.”¹³ The state appears here as the inauthentic Demiurgic ruler, who does not reflect the essence of laws, rights, and human self-activity, but rather perverts it and presents it as his own. Subsequently, Marx interprets in a similar vein the alienation of the worker and his labor: “To the worker who *appropriates* nature by means of his labor, this appropriation appears as estrangement, his own spontaneous activity as activity for another and as activity of another.”¹⁴ In the “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844” and in “Theses on Feuerbach” Marx introduces the term “*selbstbetätigung*” as self-realization, which henceforth appears as a more comprehensive variant of “*selbsttätigkeit*,” with an emphasis on becoming: self-realization implies and is attained through self-activity.

This precisely echoes the Gnostic doctrine, wherein the objective is “to make straight the true human, the essential human who still lies supine within us.”¹⁵ This Gnostic intensive twinhood also underpins Marx’s particular understanding of rights, law, and the state; these must reflect not the actual state of affairs and earthly powers, but the virtual, potential one: “The state can and must say: I guarantee right against all contingencies. Right alone is immortal in me, and therefore I prove to you the mortality of crime by doing away with it.”¹⁶ Man has a right to realize his human essence, and this right, by definition and in the absence of any external obstacles, is the embodiment of freedom; it is sacred, authentic (insofar as it accords with essence), and immortal.

All discrepancies between the actual holy Humanus and his virtual intended state are but “external obstacles,” “punishments” of the lowest world, which must be cast off by means of the Gnostic/Hermetic Revolution. This is the starting point of Marx’s distinctive soteriology: as far as Gnosticism is concerned, the inferior determined world is so corrupted and turned upside down that it is impossible for the people to free themselves from its punishments and the malign power of its rulers. Therefore, Gnosticism

needs a prophet – the unmasker, the Revealer, who will open the people’s eyes to the hidden truth: that spiritual substance has fallen into the state of matter, but that it is to be found everywhere (as *prima materia*), and that universal salvation is in the hands of one and all. Consequently, Gnosis (i.e., Knowledge) and its prophet, Savior (*soter*), play a central role in the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition. In ancient texts, Simon the Sorcerer (Simon Magus) – the archetypal figure of the Gnostic savior – comes to show the people that Limitless Power is within them.

Marx appears seventeen hundred years later for the same purpose. Unlike his orthodox Christian counterpart, the Gnostic savior comes to reunite every person (including himself) with his authentic Self. “He does not come to pardon a sin ... but to rectify a situation of ignorance and deficiency and to re-establish the original plenitude.”¹⁷ The present state of incompleteness touches the Savior himself: he is immanent to his circumstance. This is why the Gnostic Jesus tells his disciples, according to the third and fourth century gnostic text *Pistis Sophia* (The Wisdom of Faith): I have come to save you, because you are part of my power. Immanent chromatism and fellowship (all-unity) as true essence.

No eyes can be opened without the intervention of the Gnostic savior, whose main weapon is Gnosis – his theory. As Marx writes,

The self-confidence of the human being, freedom, has first of all to be aroused again in the hearts of these people. Only this feeling, which vanished from the world with the Greeks, and under Christianity disappeared into the blue mist of the heavens, can again transform society into a community of human beings united for their highest aims, into a democratic state ... For our part, we must expose the old world to the full light of day and shape the new one in a positive way.¹⁸

This “positive” work is indeed the Magnum Opus, the alchemical praxis. The requisite is concealed within existing form and must be extracted from it, purified in alchemical alembics, stripped of its inhuman integument (*Hülle*). “We develop new principles for the world out of the world’s own principles ... It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality.”¹⁹ The alchemical transmutation of imperfect metal into perfect gold (its intensive twin) takes place within the metal itself: i.e., its twin is already contained within it. Return or Revolution will begin only when the terminal point of progress is reached –

the point of the deepest fall into matter and of extreme disunity or alienation, where nearly no Light can reach. At this very point appears the Gnostic savior, who, on the one hand, exposes the actual world as an upside-down, mad (*verrückte*) world, dominated by forms alienated from man, and, on the other hand, calls upon men to pay heed to their true essence and rise up, awaken their inner man, and assume an upright posture. This is why Simon Magus, the founder of Gnosticism, is called “upright” – because he calls for the straightening up of the inner man, much in the same way as the founder of Russian cosmism, Nikolai Fedorov.

Common Being as an Alchemical Process

Marx’s understanding of the revolutionary role of the proletariat is impossible without an awareness of the Gnostic/Hermetic cosmological logic that lies at its core. This is the initial step of the “opus in black,” or the *nigredo*, which is the first stage of the alchemical work, or Magisterium: up from the very bottom, from the very darkness. For Marx it is embodied in the abject condition of the proletariat, a sphere “which, in a word, is the *complete loss of man* and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning of man*.”²⁰ The proletariat is the nonclass of a civil society, the utterly fallen man, lost to himself; this is why they alone can accomplish the Revolution! Once more: rebirth or revolution can begin only at the extreme end of progress, understood as the unfolding of substance in the world, i.e., only at its extreme fall and differentiation, its utter alienation from itself. At this point, history in a nonhuman, alienated, and antagonistic form as prehistory ends and authentic history begins: “The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production ... The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.”²¹ Gnostic progress is displaced by *epistrophe*; Revolution is afoot.

Gemeinwesen as common being is the essence of mankind, its philosopher’s stone. As with any alchemical process, it is obtained by passing through several stages. As we have seen, everything begins with the *nigredo* – the point of absolute alienation. This is always followed by the *albedo* and the *rubedo*, finally terminating in communism as the third – “truly human” – stage (according to Marx’s *Grundrisse*). But who is driving this process? Man. He is his own object and subject in the Gnostic/Hermetic dual-nondual anthropology, which is essential to an understanding of the process of *Selbstbetätigung* (self-realization, self-action, or self-actualization). Marx borrows the logic and dialectic of this process – the *selbst*-philosophy

of Gnostics/Hermetics – from Hegel. Mankind “*knows what it wills and knows it in its generality*, i.e., as something *thought*.” Hence it works and acts by reference to consciously adopted ends, known principles, and laws which are not merely *implicit* but are actually present to consciousness.”²² To be sure, Marx is trying to “turn the world upside down” by replacing Hegel’s idea/substantiality with the actual man as actual subject of self-actualization. At the same time, from the Gnostic/Hermetic perspective, there is no contradiction between Marx and Hegel: true substance emanates into the world and as the world, to its lowest limits; therefore, every part of the world at once is and is not the One: it is not universality actually, but universality virtually. Consequently, both Hegel’s Spirit and Marx’s actual man are actual subjects of self-actualization. Everything depends on one’s perspective, i.e., on anthropological perspectivism: seen from the lowest actual point of the start of the revolution, the subject is the actual man, who has attained consciousness of his situation. Or perhaps it is something even more disintegrated and alienated from itself in the course of progress than the man of Marx’s humanism – e.g., a post-human creature. The only question is, what is the lowest limit of progress? Is it the abasement of the proletariat, the post-human of contemporary speculative ontologies, or something even beyond that?

As a consequence of numerous projections and alienations of the projected from the actual subject (a Gnostic would say, “in the course of God’s emanation as the world,” while a Deleuzian would put it, “in the course of the production of differences”), authentic universal substance becomes polluted and loses itself. As the “lost sheep” undergoing continual degradation (progress), Ennoia or “Sense” – the original emanation of the One – gradually declines into Ekklesia (“Church,” paired with Anthropos in the fourth syzygy); heavenly Sophia becomes fallen Sophia, continuing downward ultimately to the fallen woman: in this way *Gemeinwesen* becomes *Wert*, maiden becomes prostitute. Ennoia – common sense as the true meaning of Commonality – becomes common in the sense of a common prostitute for the satisfaction of lowly material needs. And here, at the lowest point of degradation, Christ finds the fallen woman Mary Magdalene, and Simon Magus finds Helen in a Tyrian brothel. She accompanies him everywhere, because it is only through him (the “upstanding”) and her (the holy prostitute) that mankind receives the hope of salvation and liberation from the lowly laws of determination, or in Marx’s terms, “authentic emancipation.”

But where is Marx’s Helen? Presumably, it is *Wert* (value). Indeed, value is construed as

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universal human nature, acquired by man in the course of a series of unexamined collective operations such as universal exchange. In this regard, we must pay special attention to the first volume of *Capital*, noting numerous instances of Marx's use of alchemical terminology, such as *Wertkristall* (value-crystal), which is crystallized in the alembic of exchange. Value is construed by Marx as a kind of invisible substance, a "byproduct" distilled, precipitated, or crystallized in the course of a series of collective economic operations. Here mankind itself is seen as the collective alchemist, but the process is still undertaken unconsciously, chaotically, and invisibly, as it were, to its mutually alienated participants. Consequently, *Gemeinwesen* as authentic human nature and the requisite philosopher's stone is still working as a common prostitute in the brothel of capitalist actuality. In this brothel she is known as *Wert* (value), serving not so much her universal true nature, but rather the pseudo-gods of the lower world, especially its actual archon: capital. Now comes the Gnostic Savior and presents to the world the fallen woman Helen-Value, revealing her virtual true essence.

He begins with the dissolution of the existing false order with the help of the *alkahest* (universal solvent) of critical theory. We recall that in the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition the transfiguration of consciousness is inseparable from the transmutation of matter, the discursive from the material: this is the meaning of complex *praxis*. The Savior begins with pseudo-oneness (product) and dissolves it in the alembic of discourse, demonstrating its makeup of three basic alchemical components/principles: consumption value, exchange value, and value as such, embodied in the product. This parallels the fundamental triad of Jacob Boehme: Sour (in itself), Sweet (for others), and Bitter (in itself, but also for others), or the Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt of the alchemist. When the product dies (is consumed), its essence is separated from its material body and crystallized or "essentializes" into capital. Marx's construal of the accumulation of capital as a result of "essentialization" in the course of the consumption (death) of products echoes the experiments of the Hermetic mystic Friedrich Oetinger, who proposed to derive the essence of balm mint by boiling its crushed leaves, thus proving the presence in a body of an invisible substance – i.e., its essence – that emerges at the body's destruction.²³ To be sure, we now understand that capital is the alienated state of the philosopher's stone, the false god that must be overthrown so that the maiden may cease to prostitute herself.

We may indefinitely extend alchemical

explications of Marx and draw all manner of analogies between his ideas and various Gnostic systems – especially considering that the essence of Hermetic semiosis (per Umberto Eco) is precisely in the re-actualization and reproduction of one and the same structure in multiple systems and terminologies, or, to use the language of Roy Wagner and Viveiros de Castro, in multiplying reverse anthropologies, insisting on perspectivism. Gnostic-Hermetic semiosis and its attendant imagination are grounded in the idea that "for an authentic, correct inversion of the mental process, reason must to a certain extent be based on myth,"²⁴ i.e., on the nonrational intellectual faculty of apprehension. Consequently, myth always appears at the intersection of being and becoming: it is the (eternal) return of one and the same, but always as difference; it is, like the embryonic androgynous intensities in the cosmological egg of the Dogons, a nondual inclusive duality. We may apprehend here something of the most essential in the understanding of myth by Levi-Strauss and Viveiros de Castro and the understanding of culture as always-translation.

Our concluding intuitions are (still) shot through with an incredible idea: that the whole of post-structuralism may be read as a variant of an antiauthoritarian Gnosticism/Hermeticism in the process of becoming an (eternally) new myth. In any event, as far as we, Sophianic Marxists, are concerned, there can be no doubt about the BWO (body without organs) and the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari. As for Marx himself, he has brilliantly accomplished the (re)creation of the Gnostic/Hermetic myth, which, like any myth, can function only when reinscribed into a new discourse, convention, and context – into a new reverse anthropology. Rather than a weakness, this is the strength and resilience of Marxism. This is evident from the perspective of Sophianic Marxism because, on the one hand, the Russian geo-cultural context is sensitive to the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition: after all, the entirety of Russian religious philosophy, including Russian cosmism and Sophiology, are but specific variants of Gnostics/Hermetics. On the other hand, our context is also sensitive to revolutionary theory and Marxism because of our historical circumstances. A specific historical and philosophical constellation gives birth to a specific optics. Our Order of Sophianic Marxists is certain: a new life for Marxism shall be found in a new understanding. In Russian history, it has been so.

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Translated from the Russian by Sergey Levchin.

1
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Univocal, 2014), 39.

2
The Nag Hammadi library is a collection of early Christian and Gnostic texts discovered near the Upper Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. Their discovery significantly influenced the understanding of early Christianity in its relationships with the Hermetic tradition and Gnosticism.

3
Traditionally the Alchemist is styled as an Artist and Philosopher, denoting the fusion of art, science, and praxis. Perhaps this is the origin of the conceptualists' idea of the artist as philosopher? It seems that Marcel Duchamp was close to the comprehension of art as alchemy. See Arturo Schwarz, "The Alchemist Stripped Bare in the Bachelor, Even," in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (MoMA, 1973), 89–98. — Ed. note

4
Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 42.

5
See *Karl Marx as a Religious Type* (1906) by the former Marxist Sergei Bulgakov, in which Marxism is construed as a variety of immanentism, i.e., a variety of religious consciousness that denies the principle of transcendence; Eric Voegelin's essay "From Enlightenment to Revolution" (1975), which interprets Marxism as a secular Gnosticism; British Marxist Cyril Smith's *Karl Marx and the Future of the Human* (2005), which asserts that Marx may only be understood through the lens of the mystical-Hermetic conception of man, which forms the core of his ideas; *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (2008) by Glenn Alexander Magee, which demonstrates convincingly that Hegel's speculative philosophy is a specific avatar of Hermetism; as well Erica Lagalisie's recent book *Occult Features of Anarchism*, which analyzes the close connection between the antiauthoritarian movement of the New Era and the Gnostic/Hermetic philosophy. I will, moreover, point to numerous contemporary convergences of magic and neo-paganism and Marxism (Rhyd Wildermuth, among others), and to Andy Merrifield's book *Magical Marxism* (2011), an attempt to restore Marxism to its original power of the imagination — a central power in Hermetism. All these references to relevant books, along with the brief description of the core of Gnostic/Hermetic tradition as a subversive chromatic (i.e., immanentist dual-nondual) praxis aimed at achieving freedom from determination, omnipotence, and immortality

through man's inherent divine nature, are merely concessions to the potential skeptic, who (still) doubts the (still) incredible fact that Marxist theory may be construed as a specific variety of Gnosticism/Hermetism.

6
Karl Marx, "Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 3.

7
Marx, "Reflections of a Young Man," 8.

8
We understand the Gnostic/Hermetic tradition as the core of so-called "Western esotericism." It apparently appears in the first centuries of the common age as Gnosticism and Hermeticism and immediately goes underground as a rival of conventional Christianity, and later, science. From time to time it comes to the surface, for example during the Renaissance, the Romantic era, on the eve of the Russian Revolution, and after the 1960s. Its ideas are also found in many contemporary antiauthoritarian movements. The basic idea uniting various Gnostics/Hermetics is that human beings must emancipate themselves and the whole world from improper rulers, to gain freedom through revolution (spiritual, political, or both) and realize true all-unity as their own and the world's divine essence.

9
"Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Article 3," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, 230.

10
Gnostic/Hermetic anthropology continually presents nondual androgynous pairs, just as nondual twins occur in the cosmological egg of the Dogons, as the French anthropologists Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen describe in their 1965 book *The Pale Fox*. Such pairs are described not exclusively and dually, but intensively and inclusively, appearing, in the words of Viveiros de Castro, as "minimal form[s]

11
"Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Article 3," 262. Emphasis on original.

12
"Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Article 3," 230.

13
"Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Article 1," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, 148. Emphasis in original.

14
Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," in *Marx/Engels Collected*

Works, vol. 3 (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 281.

15
Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Basil Blackwell, 1993), 151.

16
"Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Article 3," 257.

17
Filoramo, *History of Gnosticism*, 106.

18
"Letter from Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, Cologne, May 1843," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, 137, 141.

19
"Letter from Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, Kreuznach, September 1843," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, 144.

20
Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1843), in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, 186. Emphasis in original.

21
Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (1859), in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 29 (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 263–64.

22
Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," 12. Emphasis in original.

23
See Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and Hermetic Tradition* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 80.

24
Y. Vernière, *Symboles et mythes dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Les Belles Lettres, 1977), 75. Quoted in Filoramo, *History of Gnosticism*, 50.

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