

Introduction - Issue 05: Autumn 2002

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Global recession, famine, AIDS, global warming, war and poverty : to list the instances of crises today could be an encyclopedic enterprise; the list could get longer and longer by the day. The crises that pervade the expanded reproduction of the fabric of global capitalist control (see the article by Peter Bell and Harry Cleaver) can only be plural, as plural are the social powers that long for liberation.

Not one, but a plurality of crises challenge the dogma of capitalist accumulation. Crises are bottlenecks, point of rupture in the life-energy circuit feeding the beast, but they are also ruptures in our reproduction (the meaning of this crisis of reproduction is discussed by George Caffentzis). These bottlenecks mostly serve to discipline us, to make us accept more “efficient” work norms and more “moderate” claims to social wealth. But the use of crisis as a disciplinary device is also facing a crisis; this is true of the strategies of financial liberalization discussed by Conrad Harold. The crisis of crisis: this can be a point of entry to a new dimension, the opportunity to explore new politics and new social practices beyond capitalism (see e.g. Ana Dinerstain’s article on the current struggles in Argentina). It can also be the return to old regimes of oppression (as indicated by Werner Bonefeld in the case of the European monetary union). Thus, from the perspective of the transcendence of capitalism, in the crisis reside simultaneously a danger and an opportunity—the opportunity stemming from the inability of the old ways to reproduce life, satisfy needs, meet aspirations. However, this opportunity cannot be defined in abstract. Real subjects, with real and concrete needs and aspirations, define its content and character, establish avenues of recomposition among themselves and overcome divisions. Every epoch discovers its own ways to meet the challenge. Steve Wright’s contribution from his new book explores the “workerist” tendency’s reading of earlier working class struggles in Germany, the United States, and elsewhere, and the ways in which the ‘other’ workers’ movements there sought to overcome the divisions imposed upon them by capital and the state.