The potential for a new authentic and meaningful life, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, highlights the urgent need for the construction of a new system of social metabolism, a new mode of production based on self-determined activity, based on disposable time (to produce socially-necessary use-values), on the realisation of socially-necessary labour in contrast to hetero-determined production (based on the exclusive use of surplus-time for the production of exchange-values for the market and the reproduction of capital). I shall outline in more detail these elements in the foundation of a new social-metabolic order.

The core-constitutive principles of this new life are to be found in the establishment of a social system in which: 1) the meaning of society is entirely directed towards the satisfaction of human and social needs; 2) the exercise of labour is synonymous with self-activity, free activity based on disposable time.

As we saw in the first chapter, the system of capital, stripped of any significant human-societal orientation, became a system of control where use-value was totally subordinated to exchange-value, to the reproductive necessities of capital itself. For this to occur, a structural subordination of labour to capital took place with the resulting hierarchical social division based on fetishised wage-labour. The vital functions of individual and social reproduction were radically altered, with the establishment of a set of reproductive functions – which Mészáros calls ‘second order
mediations\(^1\) – in which gender-relations, in addition to material and symbolic production (such as art), were subordinated to the imperatives of valorisation and capital-reproduction. Michael Löwy calls this:

> [t]he venal (mercantile) quantification of social life. Capitalism, regulated by exchange-value, the calculation of profits and the accumulation of capital, tends to dissolve and destroy all qualitative values: use values, ethical values, human relations, human feelings. Having replaces Being, and only subsists the monetary payment – the *cash nexus* according to the famous expression of Carlyle which Marx takes up.\(^2\)

The use-value of socially-necessary goods became subordinated to their exchange-value, which came to control the logic of capital’s social metabolism. The basic productive functions and the *control* of this process were radically separated between those who *produced* and those who *controlled*. As Marx stated, capital separated workers from the means of production, between the *snail* from its *shell*,\(^3\) widening the gap between production to meet human social necessities and production to meet the self-reproduction needs of capital.

As the first *mode of production* to create a logic that does not consider real social necessities as a priority, it marked a radical change from previous systems of social-metabolic control (of production primarily to meet the necessities of human reproduction). Capital established a system geared to its own self-valorisation that is *independent of the real reproductive needs of humanity*.

Thus, the return to a social logic aimed at meeting the needs of individuals and society is the first and deepest challenge of humanity in the new century. As Mészáros argues, ‘The imperative to go beyond capital as a social metabolic control, with its almost forbidding difficulties, is the shared predicament of humanity as a whole.’\(^4\)

Or, in Bihr’s words:

> the mode of capitalist production as a whole, by submitting nature to the abstract imperatives of capital-reproduction, engenders the ecological crisis. In the universe of capitalism, the development of productive forces is transformed into the development of the destructive forces of nature and men. From a source of wealth it becomes a source of impoverishment, in

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