

DATA browser 01  
ECONOMISING CULTURE

Carbon Defense League

Adam Chmielewski

Conglomco Media Conglomeration

Jordan Crandall

Neil Cummings

■ Gameboyzz Orchest 

■ Marina Grzinic

■ Brian Holmes

Margarete Jahrman

Esther Leslie

Marysia Lewandowska

Armin Medosch

Julian Priest

Rags Media Collective

Mirko Tobias Schäfer

James Stevens

Jeremy Valentine

The Yes Men



## INTRODUCTION TO 'THE (DIGITAL) CULTURE INDUSTRY'

Geoff Cox, Joasia Krysa & Anya Lewin

- + The interaction between culture and economy was famously explored by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer by the term 'Kulturindustrie' (The Culture Industry) to describe the production of mass culture and power relations between capitalist producers and mass consumers (1997 [1947]). Their account is a bleak one, but one that appears to hold continuing relevance, despite being written in 1944. Today, the pervasiveness of network technologies has contributed to the further erosion of the rigid boundaries between high art, mass culture and the economy, resulting in new kinds of cultural production charged with contradictions. On the one hand, the culture industry appears to allow for resistant strategies using digital technologies, but on the other it operates in the service of capital in ever more complex ways. This publication, the first in the *DATA browser* series,<sup>1</sup> uses the concept of the culture industry as a point of departure, and tests its currency under new conditions.

It has become an orthodoxy to think of culture and economy as operating together in a very general sense - blatantly expressed in arts & business funding opportunities for cultural activity, as well as in so-called 'enterprise culture'. There is perhaps a confusion here over the use of the term 'culture industry' and its relationship to other contemporary definitions, like the 'creative industries' of neo-liberal cultural policy - in which culture is linked to a cynical regeneration of capital through cultural populism, cultural policy and management, enacted by 'culturepreneurs'. The way in which Adorno and Horkheimer use the term

is explained in Adorno's subsequent essay 'The Culture Industry Reconsidered' (1991 [1967]):

'In our drafts we spoke of "mass culture". We replaced that expression with "culture industry" in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. From the latter the culture industry must be distinguished in the extreme.' (Adorno 1991: 85)

The problem with the term mass culture was simply that it was not democratic enough, and technology contributed to this effect. They explain:

'Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. It is alleged that because millions participate in it, certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods. The technical contrast between the few production centres and the large number of widely dispersed consumption points is said to demand organization and planning by management. Furthermore, it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumer's needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is the greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself.' (1997: 121)

A capitalist deployment of technology serves mass deception. Is it simply that digital technology extends what Adorno and Horkheimer call a 'rationale of dominance'? To them, domination was expressed in forms other than simply economic ones, and might be traced back to the early development of science and technology. Thus, even Marxism was cast in the Enlightenment tradition and a legitimate target for critical theory. The issue for the Frankfurt School was that tendencies in the Enlightenment had influenced the rise of instrumental,

subjective reason - and with this, had produced its own myth. Other more dynamic, contradictory explanations were largely dismissed as unscientific and mythic. They proposed that instrumental reason, tied to technological domination, be replaced with 'cynical reason'.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of technological change, Adorno and Benjamin famously disagreed on the consequences of the destruction of 'aura' of the artwork in this respect. Whilst Benjamin expressed the positive aspects of this shift, Adorno expressed more negatively that standardisation and pseudo-individuality would ensue. 'The Culture Industry' essay expressed this tendency in more detail, reflecting their associated worries of the integrative power and levelling tendencies of mass culture. However, and importantly, this was no defence of high culture as such, nor a reactionary attack of popular culture but a recognition of the breakdown of the distinction, and a means to reveal material conditions and social contradictions - somewhat demonstrating Adorno and Horkheimer's disdain for populism.

What do we mean by the 'culture industry' now? This book presents a collection of essays and practices that tackle these issues under current conditions with respect to a number of contradictory relationships: between culture and the political economy, between producers and consumers, and between standardised objects and subjects. The book aims to highlight these contradictions, and in this way suggest that critical activities might further reveal unresolved tensions through a number of tactics: from negation to de-realisation to tactical media. The question remains as to the effectiveness of these strategies and to the ways in which cultural practices that utilise the techniques and networked technologies of dominance, and indeed culture in general, are further recuperated. The term itself, 'The Culture Industry' remains a contradiction in terms with the cultural aspects of economics and the economics of culture ever more entangled. In this collection of essays, we point to some of these productive contradictions.

### Economising Culture and Politics

The Frankfurt School brand of critical theory is important in re-engaging thinking about culture in connection to the political economy and ideological critique. Critical theory therefore rejects the derivative nature of culture as simply responding to the economy as indicated in classical Marxism. In 'The Mood of Networking Culture' herein, Jeremy Valentine responds to the rhetoric of 'funky business', placing it firmly in the tradition of administrative domination that Adorno and Horkheimer introduced. He claims that rather than oppose or respond to this antagonistically, the culture industry that was once subject to the political economy is now central to it: in other words, that 'administration has become culture'. This would make contemporary cultural practices that parody business, or that is overtly administrative, entirely expected and dubiously critical. Indeed, how does a critical practice respond to these new condition where cultural activity is economised? His reference to networking culture alludes to the work of Paolo Virno (2004), in which the traditional distinctions between work, action and thinking are eroded, making leisure, 'idleness' and 'refusal' to work central to contemporary production. If this is bad news for critical theory as Valentine insists, then action needs to be upgraded to respond to these developments through new tactics.

Social struggles increasingly revolve around payment and the satisfaction of desire. It is the issue of debt that becomes a key reference for Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings's project *Capital*, and their contribution to this book. Clearly any critique based on the political economy requires an upgrade in which the concepts of value and debt are central, and new forms of symbolic exchange materialise that are not based entirely on labour value - in other words, the ways in which the uneconomic is economised. In 'An Economy of Love', drawing upon the work of Jean Baudrillard and Marcel Mauss, they describe the thinking behind their project to make a gift of art - as one way to resist the (deathly) commodity exchange of cultural production. They do this against a backdrop of the parallel histories of the Tate Gallery and The Bank of England and their symbolic economies - interestingly both founded on the

dematerialisation of value and the idea of debt/gift. An economy of love, in their terms, is one based on a gift economy and the principle of the commons. As they point out, this is in keeping with networked economies, and engages with immateriality and the symbolic value of the open source movement in general. Evidently, it is possible to disrupt the market values afforded to art and banking. They maintain: 'the gift has the potential to contest the economising of culture, the reduction of all exchange to financial calculation' - through the radicality of love.

Taking this further, Esther Leslie unequivocally states, in 'Globalica: Communism, Culture and the Commodity', that 'private property is the mainstay of capitalism' and we should continue to attend to this central issue. Private property is derived from the division of labour, and artistic production is not exempt from these conditions of production both as a form of intellectual and manual labour - and this is where critical power resides. She sees contemporary arts practice as 'marred by commodification', thoroughly entwined with the marketplace and 'deformed' accordingly, as standardised capitalist cultural forms. Like poor quality food stuffs (and there are visual prompts in the essay), they interpolate us through slogans but are bad for our general health and well-being; ultimately as the commodification of industry and culture extends to all aspects of life, turning us into what we eat or consume in front of the television (a veritable couch potato). Adorno and Horkheimer put it this way:

'The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises.... [T]he promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu.' (1997: 139)

But how can dissatisfaction with this diet be registered? To Leslie, the tactics of Dada-ist 'anti-art' seem outmoded to respond to such a complex situation. She proposes a more specific tactic of 'anti-culture'; one in which corporate power is registered and that works on the 'level of the sign' through today's 'anti-logos, anti-branding, and subvertisements'. The works of art-activists (or

rather culture-activists or hacktivists), operate through high-tech and low-tech forms and networks. To be effective, for Leslie, this practice needs to remain dialectical and one rooted in Benjamin's - not Hardt and Negri's - understanding of 'barbarism' (clearly she is drawing upon a different kind of communism in this respect).<sup>3</sup> Leslie's sense of barbarism provokes a challenge to property relations at its core through negation - and cultural production (even art) holds the potential to reveal contradictions in this respect.

In examining how individuals can reclaim a sense of autonomy from the forces of commerce and politics, Michel de Certeau asserts that users operate opposing established rules in the most ordinary of circumstances (1984). The concern is the mode of operation, not human subjects as such but their actions, that together form a culture wherein models of action are characterised by users in ways that resist the idea of passive usage or consumption. The *Gameboyzz Orchestra* reconfigures the use of the Gameboy console as a musical instrument, changing it into a productive tool of expression. In de Certeau's terms, consumers negotiate discipline and power exerted on them by tactical forms and makeshift creativity, through what he calls 'antidiscipline' (1984: xv).

The tension here is between the common use and prescribed use of technology; or rather, the relations between consumers and the mechanism of production are made complex and contradictory. Mass culture, then, holds the potential to contain ways of making in which social relations are reconstituted or hacked. Thus, there is self-evidently a political dimension to everyday practices. Everyday practices, such as shopping or cooking, are potentially 'tactical' in character offering new and strategic ways of operating. Hacking might be usefully described in these terms, as a tactical form of re-coding supplied materials and structures (code and rules), transforming one person's property into another's. In a satire inspired by Priceline.com with visual reference to Walmart.com, *Re-code.com* is a social hack exposing the software structures which dominate our lives and economy. In their words, the project points to 'the absurdity of a system that allows corporate theft to go unpunished while deeply criminilising

petty consumer theft'. The *Re-code* website allowed consumers control over prices in an extreme manner through 'tactical shopping'. The site stayed online for ten days before being taken down in response to threats from Wal-Mart. They use the figure of the 'trickster' to characterise their challenge to 'theft' as part of a more general challenge to property relations in a way that positions them as 'anti-capitalists', despite their claim that they prefer the flexibility of a term like 'critical deviant practice' (they are thinking of shoplifting). But anti-capitalist mockery of the commodity is not immune to recuperation, as Esther Leslie suggests.

### Prosumption

Production and consumption have integrated in new ways. A renewed interest in the work of the Frankfurt School coincides with these developments. The culture industry, then, can be seen to be a means of mass deception even on the level of encouraging consumers to think of themselves as producers - or what have become known as 'prosumers'. From Adorno and Horkheimer's view of standardisation, Brian Holmes outlines how 'custom objects or personalised services' now give the impression of consumer choice. In such a scenario, the 'prosumer' appears to repossess their former alienation - what he calls 'the gratifying self-possession and self-management of the networker' that further erodes some of the more positive aspects of the organisation of the State (such as the welfare state) perfectly justified by the ideology of better individualism. The concept of alienation has been effectively recuperated.

Despite any worries associated with the neo-liberal rhetoric around technology, some lingering hope remains in the DIY culture of free networks. In Julian Priest and James Stevens's contribution, wireless free networks and peer to peer file sharing reconfigure power relations in ways that challenge corporate interests and existing social relations - perhaps challenging the idea that technology serves dominance. The slogan 'trip the loop, make your switch, consume the net' encapsulates the working principles of the free networking movement in this respect: establishing local mesh networks that are controlled by users rather

than commercial interests, sharing data and working on the basis of collective utility and the optimisation of resources undermining the business model of mainstream network providers. This represents a shift in activity from a hacker pastime and internet utopianism to something 'real, useful and manageable'. Their contribution (substantially an edited version of a longer report on 'The State of Wireless London') contains many practical insights and arguments for the development of locally controlled networks, but also a word of warning: that 'autonomous media' activity prefigures each wave of technological development before recuperation kicks in, and so caution is recommended: 'The existence of the network has rather than reversed the balance between 'consumer' and producer in favour of the consumer, perhaps allowed new spaces for the market driven media to inhabit'. How do users maintain these developments as open and participatory, build independent network infrastructures, and maintain them as part of the commons?

These organising principles of the 'network commons' lead Armin Medosch to describe society in terms of an 'ad-hoc mode'. In this, he is drawing upon the work of Cornelius Castoriadis and his ideas on self-organisation and autonomy or self-determination, insofar as it contributes to an overall dynamic and 'radical social imaginary'. Medosch is concerned to characterise social progress without falling into techno-determinism, yet at the same time considers technical innovation as potentially liberatory if developed outside the determining conditions of capitalism. The network commons here is predicated on the fact that protocols can be free and open, protected by general public licences (GPL) to ensure further distribution proceeds on the same basis, leading to the proliferation of free software such as the GNU/Linux operating system, through which the network can be accessed for public utility. For Medosch, this challenges the traditional distinction between producers and consumers, offering new possibilities of activity over free networks, challenging property relations and extending the commons. Yet these developments are far from guaranteed, and the mobile telephone networks stand in sharp contrast to the idealism of the network commons - representing the contrast between open and

closed systems, as well as decentralised and centralised organisational models. The mobile phone encapsulates these contradictions and the social relations it engenders. Ad-hoc, decentralised, self-organising and mobile networks both describe the patterns of global capital and its antithesis.

Rather than negation, it is the psychoanalytical concept 'de-realisation' that protects us from recognition of the true horror of capitalism, according to Marina Grzinic. Art institutions and the art market are complicit in this, using a protective shield against differences and radical cultural practices such as activism. When alternatives are posed (Grzinic is referring to the work of Tanja Ostojic), their use is often misunderstood by the art world that hardly even recognises, or protects itself from, its own disavowals. Citing Slavoj Žižek, Grzinic claims they might be better understood through 'over-identification with the power edifice'; in what she calls the 'act of traversing the fundamental fantasy' (such as in the case of Laibach, who make all too visible the 'hidden fantasmatic scenario of the socialist totalitarian ritual', or indeed Ostojic's gender politics). For the most part, actions serve to hide the fantasy of absolute power and the ways that capitalism is required to extend its limits (aka globalisation, or Hardt and Negri's *Empire*). It is this unsatiable process of flexible accumulation, extended to the internet, that she likens to identity politics. In what she calls 'flexible colonisation', power is flexible and expansive, expressed not simply through economics but through 'biopower' - exemplified in 'hypercapitalistic market entertainment apparatuses' and the figures of Lara Croft and other 'monsters'.

This tactic of an 'over-identification' with power is one way of approaching the 'pranksterism' of The Yes Men; or more worryingly, is it the reduction of politics to the realm of entertainment (what has elsewhere been characterised as satire meets 'jack-ass TV')? Brian Holmes also suggests the absurd parody of The Yes Men, in which consent is taken to its logical extreme, is a useful example of contemporary protest action. The Yes Men's 'Yes Bush Can' campaign, in which supporters signed patriot pledge petitions that endorse tax cuts favouring the elite and the giving up of constitutional rights to support the war against

terrorism comes to mind, as does its failure. The Yes Men, in a move they call 'identity correction', wear second-hand business suits and use mock websites to create hoaxes of the WTO, right wing think tanks, or other corporate entities. They insert themselves into situations giving presentations, press conferences, and speeches in which they have used two methods of provocation: firstly, by taking right wing ideologies to their logical undemocratic conclusions in satirical speeches (scarcily rarely taken as satire) to illucidate the criminal activities of those whose identities they correct; and secondly, by trying to imagine a new and ethical power structure - for instance, imagining a WTO which actually worked for fair trade and against exploitation. Most recently, they 'corrected' Dow Chemicals by taking full responsibility for the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, announcing \$12bn in compensation to victims - and wiping \$2bn off the companies shares.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it is the expression of contradiction that remains productive. User modification or hacking appears as an interesting case study in this respect. In 'Homework', Mirko Tobias Schäfer outlines the contradictions of user modifications, in as much as they undermine the intended consumer and producer distinction. User communities share information based on open source principles. In the case study of Aibopet, initial disapproval from Sony in the form of lawsuits, turned into acceptance as a result of consumer action. However, this also represents a very clear example of recuperation at work in the way Sony, for example, have since adapted to what has become a cheap research and development opportunity. On the other hand, the cultural realm is extended through an ethos that cuts against the grain of corporate interests in open standards, transparent and shared working processes in the public domain.

It is the level at which consumers can become producers that is in question, as is the speed of recuperation. That is not to say that the relationship between consumers and producers has entirely broken down necessarily - think of the production and consumption of oil and its recent violent consequences. Despite the inevitable worries of recuperation, particularly in the games and

entertainment industries, 'total conversion' remains for Margarete Jahrmann a potentially critical activity too. She outlines the thinking behind *Nybble-Engine-Toolz* in which the shooter game engine is modified or re-engineered to 'shoot' anti-war emails to 'president@whitehouse.com'. Its highly-stylised (almost baroque) form merges with text data to create an aggressive visual assault on the conventions of the shooter-game genre. The alarming parallel of war games on mass release to American foreign policies is actualised in anti-war protest. The allusion to the futurist aesthetics of war comes to mind, as does Benjamin's statement that the aesthetics of politics will lead to one thing: war (in contrast to the politics of aesthetics, in the artwork essay of 1936).

### Standardising subjectivities

Consumers, in effect, consume ideology. This is something Hardt and Negri stress, in that industrial powers do not simply produce commodities but also subjectivities: 'In the biopolitical sphere, life is made to work for production and production is made to work for life' (2000: 32) - in a range of complex, interlinking, interactive relationships. They introduce the concept of 'biopolitics' as no longer administratively separated from life but a fully integrated and networked 'lifestyle'.

Partly in response to this way of thinking, Brian Holmes calls for a new cultural critique that builds upon the successes of the critique of capitalist globalisation and turns its attention not only to economics but to culture. This is a critique that takes into account the lessons of the tired 'cultural studies' movement that in itself requires a 'renewal of the negative, of ideology critique'.<sup>4</sup> The critical theory of the Frankfurt School stands in sharp contrast to what Žižek would call the failed politics of identity, in which culture became a site of the affirmation of different identities and these were in turn commodified. Holmes too polemically charts how contingency and negotiated readings unwittingly became a justification for transnational consumerist ideology. His concern is to forge a cultural critique that is effective - based around the figure of the 'flexible personality'. This is a strategy that is in keeping with the current flexibility of the economic system and

draws upon the work of the Frankfurt School and particularly its understanding of subjectivity. He explains some of the background to an intellectual development of a 'counter-culture' that questioned forms of authority and that 'turned against capitalist productivism in its effects on both culture and subjectivity'. The historical interest is the way in which critique has been recuperated.

Increasingly, it can be seen how critical forms have been recuperated through flexible forms of capital organisation itself; arranged in networks, fluid and mobile. The computer lies at the centre of a new form of discipline, masked by ideology, that makes everything appear uncontrolled - reminiscent of Hardt and Negri's contradictory phrase 'government without governance'. Holmes refers to this as the 'ambivalence of the networked computer' and stresses its metonymic role in the redeployment of capital. Holmes's emergent figure of the 'flexible personality' owes its character to the increasing 'autonomous status of labour' (such as expressed in the work of Lazzarato, Negri, and Virno). It is closely associated with the 'immaterial labourer' as a subjectivity 'channeled' by contemporary capitalism in the global market place. It is in this connection that Holmes remains optimistic in calling for 'artistic critique' to 'rejoin the refusal of exploitation' as part of the shared and distributed knowledge of immaterial labour. There is simply no alternative to his way of thinking.

Clearly, the standardisation of culture has become global, and in many ways the world has become standardised too - or that certainly seems to be the intended outcome of US foreign policy in tune with capitalist expansionism. Holmes too, refers to the strategies that transnational corporations employ, backed by military and legal power, to exert economic governance of the world. This ensures not only consumer demand but cheap production in free-trade zones and the like, resulting in grotesque labour conditions. Over the last thirty years or so, labour markets have become increasingly globalised with the migration of cheap foreign labour and the weakening of trade union movements. In 'Sightings', Raqs Media Collective deliver a geography lesson for the misery of 'not-quite citizens' with 'not-yet passports' and not-there addresses'. This is the reality of

a global economy in which some people have little value, goods are pirated, and migrant labour extorted. Profit comes before people in such a scenario.

'The Culture Industry Redefined' opens with the statement: 'The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms' (Adorno 1991). Raqs Media Collective outline an alternative reality in which Argentinian workers, faced with a failed money economy, developed a new parallel economy based on self-regulation and free exchange 'outside the circuit desired by capital'. Perhaps there is hope.

Less optimistically, Adam Chmielewski concentrates on the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves now - the unfolding 'Third World War'. Part of the issue is our acceptance of, and submission to, American intellectual domination and the superficial discourse around 'terrorism'. To Chmielewski, the perceived enemy has shifted from an ideology based on an alternative economic structure to one based on Islamic terrorism, that threatened the foundations of Western culture. The 'voluntary servitude' of voters simply expresses the 'interpassivity' of Western democracy, avoiding interdependent thinking altogether. This 'crisis of representation' is alluded to in Jordan Crandall's poetic essay 'On Warfare and Representation', in which intentionally blurred images of war (possibly from streamed news) make easy interpretations impossible. As Crandall states, 'to a large extent the degree to which we assign truth to an image is dependent upon the degree of our alignment with the ideological system that supports it'. Perceived accuracy 'emerges from technical development' and what he calls 'transmission verité' to point to the technology employed, rather than the image represented.

Such techniques to Chmielewski, emphasise that Western civilisation remains a myth, behind which it constructs enemies to justify its 'aggressive expansionist and exclusivist' policies and capitalist ideology performed by 'occidental militarists' with grotesque defence expenditure. The costs are clear. Chmielewski claims this is a Third World War, with a script that we have written ourselves

and in which we play our roles obediently. Clearly its engine needs hacking and modifying for more peaceful ends.

Critical theory remains theory linked to action, and herein lies the intention of this book. Under such conditions of authority, the tension between what used to be called the 'intellectual' and the 'proletariat' is 'necessary in order to combat the proletariat's conformist tendencies' (Jay 1996: 84, quoting Horkheimer). That intellectuals (at least those found in the academy) are firmly part of what is now described as the knowledge economy, makes the point more unsettling in thoroughly tying together knowledge and political interests. That critical work and knowledge, and tactics of resistance - such as those contained in this book - is subject to commodification, is a case in point. Hence the contributions to this book are released under a creative commons license agreement - with some rights reserved. Consumers of this book may copy and distribute the copyrighted work, and derivative works based upon it, but only if they give due credit, and further distribute it under a licence identical to the one that governs the work. In this spirit of cultural practices in the public domain (or commons), share it by all means but most importantly act on it.

#### 5

*Many of the ideas for this book, and indeed some of the contributions, have been informed by two previous conferences organised by the editors: 'Hybrid Discourse' (University of Plymouth, 2002) and '[Anti-]Globalica: Artistic and Conceptual Tensions in The New World Disorder' (WRO biennale, Wroclaw, Poland, 2003).*

#### NOTES:

1. In this context, the term 'browser' is useful in pointing to the framing device through which most data is now delivered over information networks. A conventional understanding of 'browsing' may suggest surface readings and the passive consumption of material. In contrast, the *DATA browser* series celebrates the potential of browsing for dynamic interpretation and 'detournement'; the rearrangement of existing material into new configurations.
2. Peter Sloterdijk explains cynical reason as 'enlightened false consciousness' (1987: 5-6).
3. The reference to barbarism is further extended by paraphrasing the way Martin Jay ends his book: the negative critical impulse allows the future possibility of writing poetry that would no longer be an act of barbarism. This, in turn, is a response to the famous Adorno quote from *Prisms*: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Jay 1996: 298). Here, barbarism takes on a different sense again than in the case of Leslie or Negri.
4. Many of the victims were extremely disappointed to find this was a hoax. One of the 'Frequently Asked Questions' on The Yes Men site <<http://www.theyesmen.org/faq/>>, reads: 'Speaking of Bhopal - didn't you raise some false hopes in Bhopal with your latest Dow stunt?' They reply: 'All hopes are false until they are realized. And the only reason the hopes of the Bhopalis are false is because Dow has decided it won't do anything. And this is exactly what we tried to highlight: this problem could easily be solved - for Dow it would be a cinch. All questions about false hopes for justice in Bhopal should be directed to Dow Chemical. In any case, the two hours of false hope - next to twenty years of unrealized ones, for those who are still alive - might be balanced by the fact that for the first time in memory, news about Bhopal and Dow was front and center in the US media, making many front pages, getting on TV, etc. Often the anniversary goes completely unnoticed...'
5. In a similar way, Esther Leslie says that in cultural studies: 'culture is misconceived as politics by other means' (herein).

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- All other references refer to texts in this volume.
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## THE FLEXIBLE PERSONALITY: FOR A NEW CULTURAL CRITIQUE

Brian Holmes

- + The events of the century's turn, from Seattle to New York, have shown that a sweeping critique of capitalist globalisation is possible, and urgently necessary - before the level of violence in the world dramatically increases. The beginnings of such a critique exist, with the renewal of 'unorthodox' economics.<sup>1</sup> But now one can look further, toward a critique of contemporary capitalist culture.

To be effective, a cultural critique must show the links between the major articulations of power and the more-or-less trivial aesthetics of everyday life. It must reveal the systematicity of social relations and their compelling character for everyone involved, even while it points to the specific discourses, images and emotional attitudes that hide inequality and raw violence. It must shatter the balance of consent, by flooding daylight on exactly what a society consents to, how it tolerates the intolerable. Such a critique is difficult to put into practice because it must work on two opposed levels, coming close enough to grips with the complexity of social processes to convince the researchers whose specialised knowledge it needs, while finding striking enough expressions of its conclusions to sway the people whom it claims to describe - those upon whose behaviour the transformation of the status quo depends.

This kind of critique existed very recently in our societies, it gave intellectual focus to an intense and widespread dissatisfaction in the sixties and seventies, it helped change an entire system. Today it seems to have vanished. No longer

does the aesthetic dimension appear as a contested bridge between the psyche and the objective structures of society. It is as though we had lost the taste for the negative, the ambition of an anti-systemic critique. In its place we find endless variants on Anglo-American 'cultural studies' - which is an affirmative strategy, a device for adding value, not for taking it away. The history of cultural studies argues today for a renewal of the negative, of ideology critique.

When it emerged in the late fifties, British cultural studies tried to reverse aesthetic hierarchies by turning the sophisticated language of literary criticism onto working-class practices and forms. Elevating popular expressions by a process of contamination that also transformed the elite culture, it sought to create positive alternatives to the new kinds of domination projected by the mass media. The approach greatly diversified the range of legitimate subjects and academic styles, thereby making a real contribution to the ideal of popular education.<sup>2</sup> What is more, cultural studies constituted a veritable *school* on the intellectual left, developing a strategic intention. However, its key theoretical tool was the notion of a differential reception, or 'negotiated reading' - a personal touch given to the message by the receiver. The notion was originally used to reveal working-class interpretations of dominant messages, in a model still based on class consciousness.<sup>3</sup> But when the emphasis on reception was detached from the dynamics of class, in the course of the 1980s, cultural studies became one long celebration of the particular twist that each individual or group could add to the globalised media product. In this way, it gave legitimacy to a new, transnational consumer ideology.<sup>4</sup> This is the discourse of alienation perfected, appropriated, individualised, ethnicised, made one's own.

How can cultural critique become effective again today? I am going to argue for the construction of an 'ideal type', revealing the intersection of social power with intimate moral dispositions and erotic drives.<sup>5</sup> I call this ideal type the *flexible personality*. The word 'flexible' alludes directly to the current economic system, with its casual labour contracts, its just-in-time production, its informational products and its absolute dependence on virtual currency circulating in the

financial sphere. But it also refers to an entire set of very positive images, spontaneity, creativity, cooperativity, mobility, peer relations, appreciation of difference, openness to present experience. If you feel close to the counter-culture of the sixties-seventies, then you can say that these are *our* creations, but caught in the distorting mirror of a new hegemony. It has taken considerable historical effort from all of us to make the insanity of contemporary society tolerable.

I am going to look back over recent history to show how a form of cultural critique was effectively articulated in intellectual and then in social terms, during the post-World War II period. But I will also show how the current structures of domination result, in part, from the failures of that earlier critique to evolve in the face of its own absorption by contemporary capitalism.

### Question Authority

The paradigmatic example of cultural critique in the postwar period is the Institut für Sozialforschung - the autonomous scholarly organisation known as the Frankfurt School. Its work can be summed up with the theoretical abbreviation of Freudo-Marxism. But what does that mean? Reviewing the texts, you find that from as early as 1936, the Institut articulated its analysis of domination around the psychosociological structures of authority. The goal of the *Studien über Autorität und Familie* was to remedy 'the failure of traditional Marxism to explain the reluctance of the proletariat to fulfill its historical role' (Jay 1996: 116). This 'reluctance' - nothing less than the working-class embrace of Nazism - could only be understood through an exploration of the way that social forces unfold in the psyche. The decline of the father's authority over the family, and the increasing role of social institutions in forming the personality of the child, was shown to run parallel to the liquidation of liberal, patrimonial capitalism, under which the nineteenth-century bourgeois owner directly controlled an inherited family capital. Twentieth-century monopoly capitalism entailed a transfer of power from private individuals to organised, impersonal corporations. The psychological state of masochistic submission to authority, described by Erich Fromm, was inseparable from the mechanised order of the

new industrial cartels, their ability to integrate individuals within the complex technological and organisational chains of mass-production systems. The key notion of 'instrumental reason' was already in germ here. As Marcuse wrote in 1941:

'The facts directing man's thought and action are... those of the machine process, which itself appears as the embodiment of rationality and expediency.... Mechanized mass production is filling the empty spaces in which individuality could assert itself.' (1988: 143, 158)

The Institut's early work combined a psychosociological analysis of authoritarian discipline with the philosophical notion of instrumental reason. But its powerful anti-systemic critique could not crystallise without studies of the centrally planned economy, conceived as a social and political response to the economic crisis of the 1930s. Institut members Friedrich Pollock and Otto Kirchheimer were among the first to characterise the new 'state capitalism' of the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Overcoming the traditional Marxist portrayal of monopoly capitalism, which had met its dialectical contradiction in the crisis of 1929, they described a definitive shift away from the liberal system where production and distribution were governed by contractualised market relations between individual agents. The new system was a managerial capitalism, where production and distribution were calculated by a central-planning state. The extent of this shift was confirmed not only by the Nazi-dominated industrial cartels in Germany, but also by the Soviet five-year plans, or even the American New Deal, anticipating the rise of the Keynesian welfare state. Authority was again at the centre of the analysis. 'Under state capitalism', wrote Pollock, 'men meet each other as commander or commanded' (1988: 78). Or, in Kirchheimer's words: 'Fascism characterizes the stage at which the individual has completely lost his independence and the ruling groups have become recognized by the state as the sole legal parties to political compromise.' (1988: 70)

The resolution of economic crisis, by centralised planning for total war, concretely revealed what Pollock called the 'vital importance' of an investigation

'as to whether state capitalism can be brought under democratic control' (1988). This investigation was effectively undertaken by the Institut during its American exile, when it sought to translate its analysis of Nazism into the American terms of the Cold War. What we now remember most are the theory and critique of the culture industry, and the essay of that name; but much more important at the time was a volume of sociological research called *The Authoritarian Personality*, published in 1950 (Adorno *et al.* 1950). Written under Horkheimer's direction by a team of four authors including Adorno, the book was an attempt to apply statistical methods of sociology to the empirical identification of a fascistic character structure. It used questionnaire methods to demonstrate the existence of a 'new anthropological type' whose traits were rigid conventionalism, submission to authority, opposition to everything subjective, stereotypy, an emphasis on power and toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, the projection outside the self of unconscious emotional impulses, and an exaggerated concern with sexual scandal. In an echo to the earlier study of authority, these traits were correlated with a family structure marked not by patriarchal strength but rather weakness, resulting in attempts to sham an ascendancy over the children which in reality had devolved to social institutions.

*The Authoritarian Personality* represents the culmination of a deliberately programmed, interdisciplinary construction of an ideal type: a polemical image of the social self which could then guide and structure various kinds of critique. The capacity to focus different strands of critique is the key function of this ideal type, whose importance goes far beyond that of the statistical methodologies used in the questionnaire-study. Adorno's rhetorical and aesthetic strategies, for example, only take on their full force in opposition to the densely constructed picture of the authoritarian personality. Consider this quote from the essay on 'Commitment' in 1961:

'Newspapers and magazines of the radical Right constantly stir up indignation against what is unnatural, over-intellectual, morbid and decadent: they know their readers. The insights of social psychology into the authoritarian personality confirm them. The basic features of this type include conformism, respect for a

petrified façade of opinion and society, and resistance to impulses that disturb its order or evoke inner elements of the unconscious that cannot be admitted. This hostility to anything alien or alienating can accommodate itself much more easily to literary realism of any provenance, even if it proclaims itself critical or socialist, than to works which swear allegiance to no political slogans, but whose mere guise is enough to disrupt the whole system of rigid coordinates that governs authoritarian personalities....' (Adorno 1988: 303)

Adorno seeks to show how Brechtian or Sartrean political engagement could shade gradually over into the unquestioning embrace of order that marks an authoritarian state. The fractured, enigmatic forms of Beckett or Schoenberg could then be seen as more politically significant than any call to rally collectively around a cause. Turned at once against the weak internal harmonies of a satisfied individualism, and against the far more powerful totalisations of an exploitative system, aesthetic form in Adorno's vision becomes a dissenting force through its refusal to falsely resolve the true contradictions. As he writes in one of his rhetorical phrases: 'It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads' (1988: 304).

The point is not to engage in academic wrangling over exactly how Adorno conceived this resistance of contradictory forms. More interesting is to see how a concerted critique can help give rise to effective resistance in society. The most visible figure here is Herbert Marcuse, whose 1964 book *One-Dimensional Man* became an international best-seller, particularly in France. Students in the demonstrations of May '68 carried placards reading 'Marx, Mao, Marcuse'. But this only shows how Marcuse, with his directly revolutionary stance, could become a kind of emblem for converging critiques of the authoritarian state, industrial discipline and the mass media. In France, Sartre had written of 'serialized man', while Cornelius Castoriadis developed a critique of bureaucratic productivism. In America, the business writer William Whyte warned against the 'organization man' as early as 1956, while in 1961 an outgoing president,

Dwight D. Eisenhower, denounced the technological dangers of the 'military-industrial complex'. Broadcast television was identified as the major propaganda tool of capitalism, beginning with Vance Packard's book *The Hidden Persuaders* in America in 1957, then continuing more radically with Barthes' *Mythologies* in France and above all, Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Ivan Illich and Paul Goodman attacked school systems as centres of social indoctrination, R.D. Laing and Félix Guattari called for an *anti-psychiatry*, and Henri Lefebvre for an *anti-urbanism*, which the Situationists put into effect with the practice of the *dérive*. In his *Essay on Liberation*, written immediately after '68, Marcuse went so far as to speak of an outbreak of mass surrealism - which, he thought, could combine with a rising of the racialised lumpen proletariat in the US and a wider revolt of the Third World.

I do not mean to connect all this subversive activity directly to the Frankfurt School. But the 'Great Refusal' of the late sixties and early seventies was clearly aimed at the military-industrial complexes, at the regimentation and work discipline they produced, at the blandishments of the culture industry that concealed these realities, and perhaps above all, at the existential and psychosocial condition of the 'authoritarian personality'. The right-wing sociologist Samuel Huntington recognised as much, when he described the revolts of the 1960s as 'a general challenge to the existing systems of authority, public and private' (Crozier *et al.* 1975: 74). But that was just stating the obvious. In seventies America, the omnipresent counter-culture slogan was 'Question Authority'.

What I have tried to evoke here is the intellectual background of an effective anti-systemic movement, turned against capitalist productivism in its effects on both culture and subjectivity. All that is summed up in a famous bit of French graffiti, *On ne peut pas tomber amoureux d'une courbe de croissance* ('You can't fall in love with a growth curve'). In its very erotics, that writing on the walls of May '68 suggests what I have not yet mentioned, which is the positive content of the anti-systemic critique: a desire for equality and social unity, for the suppression of the class divide. Self-management and direct democracy were the fundamental

demands of the student radicals in 1968, and by far the most dangerous feature of their leftist ideology.<sup>7</sup> As Jürgen Habermas wrote in 1973:

‘Genuine participation of citizens in the processes of political will-formation, that is, substantive democracy, would bring to consciousness the contradiction between administratively socialized production and the continued private appropriation and use of surplus value.’ (1975: 36)

In other words, increasing democratic involvement would rapidly show people where their real interests lie. Again, Huntington seemed to agree, when he in turn described the ‘crisis’ of the advanced societies as ‘an excess of democracy’ (Crozier *et al.* 1975: 113).

One might recall that the infamous 1975 Trilateral Commission report in which Huntington made that remark was specifically concerned with the growing ‘ungovernability’ of the developed societies, in the wake of the social movements of the sixties. One might also recall that this spectre of ungovernability was precisely the foil against which Margaret Thatcher, in England, was able to marshal up her ‘conservative revolution’.<sup>8</sup> In other words, what Huntington called ‘the democratic distemper’ of the sixties was the background against which the present neoliberal hegemony arose. And so the question I would now like to ask is this: how did the postindustrial societies absorb the ‘excess of democracy’ that had been set loose by the anti-authoritarian revolts? Or to put it another way: how did the 1960s finally serve to make the 1990s tolerable?

### **Divide and Recuperate**

‘We lack a serious history of co-optation, one that understands corporate thought as something other than a cartoon’, writes the American historian and culture critic Thomas Frank (1997: 8). In a history of the advertising and fashion industries called *The Conquest of Cool*, he attempts to retrieve the specific strategies that made sixties ‘hip’ into nineties ‘hegemon’, transforming cultural industries based on stultifying conformism into even more powerful industries based on a plethora of offer of ‘authenticity, individuality, difference, and rebellion’. With a host of examples, he shows how the desires of middle-class dropouts in

the sixties were rapidly turned into commodified images and products. Avoiding a simple manipulation theory, Frank concludes that the advertisers and fashion designers involved had an existential interest in transforming the system. The result was a change in ‘the ideology by which business explained its domination of the national life’ - a change he relates, but only in passing, to David Harvey’s concept of ‘flexible accumulation’ (1997: 229).<sup>20</sup> Beyond the chronicle of stylistic co-optation, what still must be explained are the interrelations between individual motivations, ideological justifications and the complex social and technical functions of a new economic system.

A starting point can be taken from a few suggestive remarks by the business analysts Piore and Sabel, in a book called *The Second Industrial Divide* (1984). Here the authors speak of a *regulation crisis*, which ‘is marked by the realization that existing institutions no longer secure a workable match between the production and the consumption of goods’ (1984: 4). They locate two such crises in the history of the industrial societies, both of which we have already considered through the eyes of the Frankfurt School: ‘the rise of the large corporations, in the late nineteenth century, and of the Keynesian welfare state, in the 1930s’ (1984: 5). Our own era has seen a third such crisis: the prolonged recession of the 1970s, culminating with the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, and accompanied by endemic labour unrest throughout the decade. This crisis provoked the institutional collapse of the Fordist mass-production regime and the welfare state, and thereby set the stage for an *industrial divide*, which the authors situate in the early 1980s:

‘The brief moments when the path of industrial development itself is at issue we call industrial divides. At such moments, social conflicts of the most apparently unrelated kinds determine the direction of technological development for the following decades. Although industrialists, workers, politicians, and intellectuals may only be dimly aware that they face technological choices, the actions that they take shape economic institutions for long into the future. Industrial divides are therefore the backdrop or frame for subsequent regulation crises.’ (Piore & Sabel 1984: 5)

Basing themselves on observations from Northern Italy, the authors describe the emergence of a new production regime called 'flexible specialization', which they characterise as 'a strategy of permanent innovation: accommodation to ceaseless change, rather than an effort to control it' (1984: 16). Abandoning the centralised planning of the postwar years, this new strategy works through the agency of small, independent production units, employing skilled work teams with multi-use tool kits and relying on relatively spontaneous forms of cooperation with other such teams to meet rapidly changing market demands at low cost and high speed. These kinds of firms seemed to hark back to the social relations between craftsmen in the early nineteenth century, before the first industrial divide that led to the introduction of heavy machinery and the mass-production system.<sup>10</sup> But the reality, within and beyond Northern Italy, has proven more complex; and in 1984 Piore and Sabel could not yet have predicted the subjective and organisational importance that would be acquired by a single set of products, far from anything associated with the nineteenth century: the personal computer and telecommunications devices.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the relation they drew between a crisis in institutional regulation and an industrial divide can help us understand the key role that social conflict - and the cultural critique that helps focus it - has played in shaping the organisational forms and the very technology of the world we live in.

What then were the conflicts that made computing and telecommunications into the central products of the new wave of economic growth that began after the 1970s recession? How did these conflicts affect the labour, management and consumption regimes? Which social groups were integrated to the new hegemony of flexible capitalism, and how? Which were rejected or violently excluded, and how was that violence covered over?

So far, the most suggestive set of answers to these questions has come from Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, in *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalism*, published in 1999.<sup>12</sup> Their thesis is that each age or 'spirit' of capitalism must justify its irrational compulsion for accumulation by at least partially integrating or

'recuperating' the critique of the previous era, so that the system can become tolerable again - at least for its own managers. They identify two main challenges to capitalism: the critique of exploitation, or what they call 'social critique', developed traditionally by the worker's movement, and the critique of alienation, or what they call 'artistic critique'. The latter, they say, was traditionally a minor, literary affair; but it became vastly more important with the mass cultural education carried out by the welfare-state universities. Boltanski and Chiapello trace the destinies of the major social groups in France after the turmoil of '68, when *critique sociale* joined hands with *critique artiste*. They show how the most organised fraction of the labour force was accorded unprecedented economic gains, even as future production was gradually reorganised and delocalised to take place outside union control and state regulation. But they also demonstrate how the young, aspiring managerial class, whether still in the universities or at the lower echelons of enterprise, became the major vector for the artistic critique of authoritarianism and bureaucratic impersonality. The strong point of Boltanski and Chiapello's book is to demonstrate how the organisational figure of the network emerged to provide a magical answer to the anti-systemic cultural critique of the 1950s and 60s - a magical answer, at least for the aspirant managerial class.

What are the social and aesthetic attractions of networked organisation and production? First, the pressure of a rigid, authoritarian hierarchy is eased, by eliminating the complex middle-management ladder of the Fordist enterprises and opening up shifting, one-to-one connections between network members. Second, spontaneous communication, creativity and relational fluidity can be encouraged in a network as factors of productivity and motivation, thus overcoming the alienation of impersonal, rationalised procedures. Third, extended mobility can be tolerated or even demanded, to the extent that tool-kits become increasingly miniaturised or even purely mental, allowing work to be relayed through telecommunications channels. Fourth, the standardisation of products that was the visible mark of the individual's alienation under the mass-production regime can be attenuated, by the configuration of small-scale

or even micro-production networks to produce limited series of custom objects or personalised services.<sup>13</sup> Fifth, desire can be stimulated and new, rapidly obsolescent products can be created by working directly within the cultural realm as coded by multimedia in particular, thus at once addressing the demand for meaning on the part of employees and consumers, and resolving part of the problem of falling demand for the kinds of long-lasting consumer durables produced by Fordist factories.

As a way of summing up all these advantages, it can be said that the networked organisation gives back to the employee - or better, to the 'prosumer' - the *property* of him- or herself that the traditional firm had sought to purchase as the commodity of labour power. Rather than coercive discipline, it is a new form of internalised vocation, a 'calling' to creative self-fulfillment in and through each work project, that will now shape and direct the employee's behaviour. The strict division between production and consumption tends to disappear, and alienation appears to be overcome, as individuals aspire to mix their labour with their leisure.<sup>14</sup> Even the firm begins to conceive of work qualitatively, as a sphere of creative activity, of self-realisation. 'Connectionist man' - or in my terms, 'the networker' - is delivered from direct surveillance and paralysing alienation to become the manager of his or her own self-gratifying activity, as long as that activity translates at some point into valuable economic exchange, the *sine qua non* for remaining within the network.

Obviously, the young advertisers and fashion designers described by Thomas Frank could see a personal interest in this loosening of hierarchies. But the gratifying self-possession and self-management of the networker has an ideological advantage as well: responding to the demands of May '68, it becomes the perfect legitimating argument for the continuing destruction, by the capitalist class, of the heavy, bureaucratic, alienating, profit-draining structures of the welfare state that also represented most of the historical gains that the workers had made through social critique. By co-opting the aesthetic critique of alienation, the culture of the networked enterprise was able to legitimate

the gradual exclusion of the workers' movement and the destruction of social programmes. Thus - through the process that Raymond Williams calls the 'selective tradition' (1989)<sup>15</sup> - a selective, tendentious version of artistic critique emerged as one of the linchpins of the new hegemony invented in the early 1980s by Reagan and Thatcher, and perfected in the 1990s by Clinton and the inimitable Tony Blair.

To recuperate from the setbacks of the sixties and seventies, capitalism had to become doubly flexible, imposing casual labour contracts and 'delocalised' production sites to escape the regulation of the welfare state, and using this fragmented production apparatus to create the consumer seductions and stimulating careers that were needed to regain the loyalty of potentially revolutionary managers and intellectual workers. This double movement is what gives rise to the system conceived by David Harvey as a regime of 'flexible accumulation' - a notion that describes not only the structure and discipline of the new work processes, but also the forms and lifespans of the individually tailored and rapidly obsolescent products, as well as the new, more volatile modes of consumption that the system promotes (1990: 141-8). For the needs of contemporary cultural critique we should recognise, at the crux of this transformation, the role of the personal computer, assembled along with its accompanying telecommunications devices in high-tech sweatshops across the world. Technically a calculator, based on the most rigid principles of order, the personal computer has been turned by its social usage into an image- and language machine: the productive instrument, communications vector and indispensable receiver of the immaterial goods and semiotic or even emotional services that now form the leading sector of the economy.<sup>16</sup>

The computer and its attendant devices are at once industrial and cultural tools, embodying a compromise between control and creativity that has temporarily resolved the cultural crisis unleashed by artistic critique. Freedom of movement, which can be idealised in the figures of nomadism and roving desire, is one of the central features of this compromise. The laptop computer frees the skilled

intellectual worker or the nomadic manager for forms of mobility both physical and fantasmatic, while at the same time serving as a portable instrument of control over the casualised labourer and the fragmented production process. It successfully miniaturises one's access to the remaining bureaucratic functions, while also opening a private channel into the realms of virtual or 'fictitious' capital, the financial markets where surplus value is produced as if by magic, despite the accumulating signs of environmental decay. In this way, the organisational paradigm of the network grants an autonomy which can be channeled into a new productive discipline, wherein the management of social relations over distance is a key factor, constantly open to a double interpretation. To recognise this profound ambivalence of the networked computer - that is, the way its communicative and creative potentials have been turned into the basis of an ideology masking its remote control functions - is to recognise the substance and the fragility of the hegemonic compromise on which the flexible accumulation regime of globalising capital has been built.

Geographical dispersal and global coordination of manufacturing, just-in-time production and containerised delivery systems, a generalised acceleration of consumption cycles, and a flight of overaccumulated capital into the lightning-fast financial sphere, whose movements are at once reflected and stimulated by the equally swift evolution of global media: these are among the major features of the flexible accumulation regime as it has developed since the late 1970s. David Harvey, in quintessential Marxist fashion, sees this transnational redeployment of capital as a reaction to working-class struggles, which increasingly tended to limit the levels of resource and labour exploitation possible within nationally regulated space. A similar kind of reasoning is used by Piore and Sabel when they claim that 'social conflicts of the most apparently unrelated kinds determine the course of technological development' at the moment of an industrial divide. But even if they do not seem to grasp the full ambivalence of the ideal type they describe, nonetheless it is primarily Boltanski and Chiapello's analytical division of the resistance movements of the sixties into the two strands of artistic and social critique, that allows us to understand how the specific aesthetic

dispositions and organisational structures of the flexible personality began to crystallise from the mid-1980s onward, to complete capitalism's recuperation of - and from - the democratic turmoil of the 1960s.

### **Beneath A New Dominion**

If I insist on the *social form* assumed by computers and telecommunications during the redeployment of capital after the recession of the 1970s, it is because of the central role that these technologies, and their diverse *uses*, have played in the emergence of the global informational economy of today. Describing the most advanced state of this economy, Manuel Castells writes that 'the products of the new information technology industries are information processing devices or information processing itself' (1996: 67). Thus he indicates the way that cultural expressions, recoded and processed as multimedia, can enter the value-adding loop of digitised communications. Indeed, he believes they *must* enter it: 'All other messages are reduced to individual imagination or to increasingly marginalized face-to-face subcultures' (1996: 374). But Castells tends to see the conditions of entry as fundamentally technical, without developing the notion that technology itself can be shaped by patterns of social, political and cultural relations. He conceives subjective and collective agency in terms of a primary choice or rejection of the network, followed by more or less viable paths within or outside the dominant system. The network itself is not a form, but a destiny. Any systemic change is out of the question.

A critical approach can instead view computers and telecommunications as specific, pliable configurations within the larger frame of what Michel Foucault calls 'governmental technologies'. Foucault defines the governmental technologies (or more generally, 'governmentality') as 'the entire set of practices used to constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals, in their freedom, can have towards each other' (1994: 728).<sup>17</sup> At stake here is the definition of a level of constraint, extending beyond what Foucault conceives as freedom - the open field of power relations between individuals, where each one tries to 'conduct the conduct of others', through strategies that are always

reversible - but not yet reaching the level of domination where the relations of power are totally immobilised, for example through physical constraint. The governmental technologies exist just beneath this level of domination: they are subtler forms of collective channeling, appropriate for the government of democratic societies where individuals enjoy substantial freedoms and tend to reject any obvious imposition of authority.

It is clear that the crisis of 'ungovernability' decried by Huntington, Thatcher and other neoconservatives in the mid-1970s could only find its 'resolution' with the introduction of new governmental technologies, determining new patterns of social relations; and it has become rather urgent to see exactly how these relational technologies function. To begin quite literally with the hardware, we could consider the extraordinary increase in surveillance practices since the introduction of telematics. It has become commonplace at any threshold - border, cash register, subway turnstile, hospital desk, credit application, commercial website - to have one's personal identifiers (or even body parts: finger- or handprints, retina patterns, DNA) checked against records in a distant database, to determine if passage will be granted. This appears as direct, sometimes even authoritarian control. But as David Lyon observes, 'each expansion of surveillance occurs with a rationale that, like as not, will be accepted by those whose data or personal information is handled by the system' (2001: 44). The most persuasive rationales are increased security (from theft or attack) and risk management by various types of insurers, who demand personal data to establish contracts. These and other arguments lead to the internalisation of surveillance imperatives, whereby people actively supply their data to distant watchers. But this example of voluntary compliance with surveillance procedures is only the tip of the control iceberg. The more potent and politically immobilising forms of self-control emerge in the individual's relation to the labour market - particularly when the labour in question involves the processing of cultural information.

Salaried labour, whether performed on site or at distant, telematically connected locations, can obviously be monitored for compliance to the rules (surveillance

cameras, telephone checks, keystroke counters, radio-emitting badges, etc.). The offer of freelance labour, on the other hand, can simply be refused if any irregularity appears, either in the product or the conditions of delivery. Internalised self-monitoring becomes a vital necessity for the freelancer. Cultural producers are hardly an exception, to the extent that they offer their inner selves for sale: at all but the highest levels of artistic expression, subtle forms of self-censorship become the rule, at least in relation to a primary market (Corsani *et al.* 1996: 71-8).<sup>18</sup> But deeper and perhaps more insidious effects arise from the inscription of cultural, artistic and ethical ideals, once valued for their permanence, into the swiftly changing cycles of capitalist valorisation and obsolescence. Among the data processors of the cultural economy - including the myriad personnel categories of media production, design and live performance, and also extending through various forms of service provision, counseling, therapy, education and so on - a depoliticising cynicism is more widespread than self-censorship. It is described by Paolo Virno:

'At the base of contemporary cynicism is the fact that men and women learn by experiencing rules rather than "facts"... Learning the rules, however, also means recognizing their unfoundedness and conventionality. We are no longer inserted into a single, predefined "game" in which we participate with true conviction. We now face several different "games", each devoid of all obviousness and seriousness, only the site of an immediate self-affirmation - an affirmation that is much more brutal and arrogant, much more cynical, the more we employ, with no illusions but with perfect momentary adherence, those very rules whose conventionality and mutability we have perceived.' (1996: 17-8)

In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard identified language games as an emerging arena of value-production in capitalist societies offering computerised access to knowledge, where what mattered was not primary research but transformatory 'moves' within an arbitrary semantic field (1979: 13-4, 31-3). With this linguistic turn of the economy, the unpredictable semiotic transformations of Mallarmé's 'roll of the dice' became a competitive social gamble, as in stock markets beset by insider trading, where chance is another name for ignorance of precisely who is

manipulating the rules. Here, cynicism is both the cause and prerequisite of the player's unbounded opportunism. As Virno notes: 'The opportunist confronts a flux of interchangeable possibilities, keeping open as many as possible, turning to the closest and swerving unpredictably from one to the other'. He continues: 'The computer, for example, rather than a means to a univocal end, is a premise for successive "opportunistic" elaborations of work. Opportunism is valued as an indispensable resource whenever the concrete labor process is pervaded by diffuse "communicative action"... computational chatter demands "people of opportunity", ready and waiting for every chance.' (1996: 17)<sup>19</sup>

Of course, the true opportunist consents to a fresh advantage within any new language game, even if it is political. Politics collapses into the flexibility and rapid turnover times of market relations. And this is the meaning of Virno's ironic reference to Habermas's theory of communicative action. In his analysis of democracy's legitimation crisis, Habermas observed that consent in democratic societies ultimately rests on each citizen's belief that in cases of doubt he could be convinced by a detailed argument:

'Only if motivations for actions no longer operated through norms requiring justification, and if personality systems no longer had to find their unity in identity-securing interpretive systems, could the acceptance of decisions without reasons become routine, that is, could the readiness to conform absolutely be produced to any desired degree.' (1975: 44)

What was social science fiction for Habermas in 1973 became a reality for Virno in the early 1990s: personality systems without any aspiration to subjective truth, without any need for secure processes of collective interpretation. And worse, this reality was constructed on distorted forms of the call, by the radical Italian left, for an autonomous status of labour.

The point becomes clear: to describe the immaterial labourer, 'prosumer', or networker as a *flexible personality* is to describe a new form of alienation, not alienation from the vital energy and roving desire that were exalted in the 1960s,

but instead, alienation from political society, which in the democratic sense is not a profitable affair and cannot be endlessly recycled into the production of images and emotions. The configuration of the flexible personality is a new form of social control, in which culture has an important role to play. It is a distorted form of the artistic revolt against authoritarianism and standardisation: a set of practices and techniques for 'constituting, defining, organizing and instrumentalizing' the revolutionary energies which emerged in the Western societies in the 1960s, and which for a time seemed capable of transforming social relations.

This notion of the flexible personality, that is, of subjectivity as it is modeled and channeled by contemporary capitalism, can be sharpened and deepened by looking outside of France and beyond the aspirant managerial class, to the destiny of another group of proto-revolutionary social actors, the racialised lumpen proletariat in America, from which arose the powerful emancipatory forces of the Black, Chicano and American Indian movements in the sixties, followed by a host of identity-groups thereafter. Here, at one of the points where a real threat was posed to the capitalist system, the dialectic of integration and exclusion becomes more apparent and more cruel. On the one hand, identity formations are encouraged as stylistic resources for commodified cultural production, with the effect of deflecting the issues away from social antagonism. Thus for example, the mollifying discourses of late cultural studies, with their focus on the entertainment media, could provide an excellent distraction from the kind of serious conflict that began to emerge in American universities in the early 1990s, when a movement arose to make narratives of minority emancipation such as *I, Rigoberta Menchú* a part of the so-called 'literary canon'. Using the enormous resources concentrated by the major commercial media - television, cinema, pop music - regional cultures and subcultures are sampled, recoded into product form, and fed back to their original creators via the immeasurably wider and more profitable world market.<sup>20</sup> Local differences of reception are seized upon everywhere as proof of the open, universal nature of global products. Corporate and governmental hierarchies are also made open to significant numbers of non-white subjects, whenever they are willing to play the management game.

This is an essential requirement for the legitimacy of transnational governance. But wherever an identity formation becomes problematic and seems likely to threaten the urban, regional, or geopolitical balance - I'm thinking particularly of the Arab world, but also of the Balkans - then what Boris Buden calls the 'cultural touch' operates quite differently and casts ethnic identity not as commercial gold, but as the signifier of a regressive, 'tribal' authoritarianism, which can legitimately be repressed. Here the book *Empire* contains an essential lesson: that not the avoidance, but instead the stimulation and management of local conflicts is the keystone of transnational governance (Hardt & Negri 2000: 198-201).<sup>21</sup> In fact the United States themselves are already governed that way, in a state of permanent low-intensity civil war. Manageable, arms-consuming ethnic conflicts are perfect grist for the mill of capitalist empire. And the reality of terrorism offers the perfect opportunity to accentuate surveillance functions - with full consent from the majority of the citizenry.

With these last considerations we have obviously changed scales, shifting from the psychosocial to the geopolitical. But to make the ideal type work correctly, one should never forget the hardened political and economic frames within which the flexible personality evolves. Piore and Sabel point out that what they call 'flexible specialization' was only one side of the response that emerged to the regulation crisis and recession of the 1970s. The other strategy is global: '[It] aims at extending the mass-production model. It does so by linking the production facilities and markets of the advanced countries with the fastest-growing third-world countries. This response amounts to the use of the corporation (now a multinational entity) to stabilize markets in a world where the forms of cooperation among states can no longer do the job.' (1984: 16-7)<sup>22</sup>

In effect, the transnational corporation, piloted by the financial markets, and backed up by the military power and legal architecture of the G-7 states, has taken over the economic governance of the world from the former colonial-imperialist structures. It has installed, not the 'multinational Keynesianism' that Piore and Sabel considered possible - an arrangement which would have entailed

regulatory mechanisms to ensure consumer demand throughout the world - but instead, a system of predatory investment, calculated for maximum shareholder return, where macro-economic regulation functions only to insure minimal inflation, tariff-free exchange, and low labour costs. The 'military-industrial complex', decried as the fountainhead of power in the days of the authoritarian personality, has been superseded by what is now being called the: 'Wall Street-Treasury complex' - 'a power élite à la C. Wright Mills, a definite networking of like-minded luminaries among the institutions—Wall Street, the Treasury Department, the State Department, the IMF, and the World Bank most prominent among them.' (Bhawati 1998)

What kind of labour regime is produced by this transnational networking among the power elite? On June 13, 2001, one could read in the newspaper that a sharp drop in computer sales had triggered layoffs of 10% of Compaq's world-wide workforce, and 5% of Hewlett Packard's - 7,000 and 4,700 jobs respectively. In this situation, the highly mobile Dell corporation was poised to draw a competitive advantage from its versatile workforce: 'Robots are just not flexible enough, whereas each computer is unique', explained the president of Dell Europe.<sup>23</sup> With its just-in-time production process, Dell can immediately pass along the drop in component prices to consumers, because it has no old product lying around in warehouses; at the same time, it is under no obligation to pay idle hands for regular 8-hour shifts when there is no work. Thus it has already grabbed the number-1 position from Compaq and it is hungry for more. 'It's going to be like Bosnia', gloated an upper manager, 'Taking such market shares is the chance of a lifetime'.

This kind of ruthless pleasure, against a background of exploitation and exclusion, has become entirely typical - an example of the opportunism and cynicism that the flexible personality tolerates (Dejours 1998).<sup>24</sup> But was this what we really expected from the critique of authority in the 1960s?

### Conclusions

Posing as a WTO representative, a provocateur from the group known as the Yes Men recently accepted an invitation to speak at the 'Textiles of the Future' conference in Tampere, Finland. Taking both an historical and a futuristic view, Hank Hardy Unruh explained how an unpleasant event like the US Civil War need never have happened: market laws ensure that cotton-picking slaves in the South would eventually have been freed. Feeding, clothing, housing and policing a slave in a country like Finland would be absurdly expensive today, he argued, compared to wages in a country like Gabon, where the costs of food, clothes and lodging are minimal, and even better, the price of policing is nil, since the workers are free. But he cautioned that the use of a remote workforce had already been tried in countries like India: and the screen of his PowerPoint presentation showed footage of rioters protesting British rule. To keep a Ghandi-like situation of workers' revolt, hand-spun cotton and local self-sufficiency from ever developing again in our time, he said, the WTO had a textile solution.

It was at this point that an assistant appeared before the crowd and ripped off Mr. Unruh's standard business attire to reveal a glittering, golden, skin-tight body suit, equipped with a yard-long inflatable phallus suddenly springing up from the groin area and seeming to dance about with a life of its own. Animated graphics on the PowerPoint screen showed a similarly outfitted man cavorting on a tropical beach: the Management Leisure Suit, Unruh explained, was conceived to transmit pleasing information through implanted body-chips when things were going well in the distant factory. But the end of the protuberance housed a television monitor, with a telematic control panel allowing the manager to intervene whenever unpleasant information signaled trouble in the making: 'This is the Employee Visualization Appendage, an instantly deployable hip-mounted device with hands-free operation, which allows the manager to see his employees directly, as well as receive all relevant data about them', Unruh continued,<sup>25</sup> while the audience clapped and whistled.

With this absurd parody, the Yes Men, archetypal figures of our society's

capacity for consent, seem to have captured every detail of the modern control and consumption regime. Could one possibly imagine a better image of the style-conscious, tech-savvy, nomadic and hedonistic modern manager, connected directly into flows of information, able and compelled to respond to any fluctuation, but enjoying his life at the same time - profiting lavishly from his stock options, always up in the air between vocation and vacation, with unlimited pleasure and technological control right at his fingertips? True to its ethics of toleration, the corporate audience loved the textiles, the technologies, and the joke as well, at least until the entire conference was ridiculed in the press the next day. Did they even wince as images of the distant workers - fifteen-year-old Asian women on a factory floor, kids squatting at lathes - flashed up rapidly on the PowerPoint screen?

\* \* \*

The flexible personality represents a contemporary form of governmentality, an internalised and culturalised pattern of 'soft' coercion, which nonetheless can be directly correlated to the hard data of labour conditions, bureaucratic and police practices, border regimes and military interventions. Now that the typical characteristics of this mentality - and indeed of this 'culture-ideology'<sup>26</sup> - have come fully into view, it is high time that we intervene, as intellectuals and citizens. The study of coercive patterns, contributing to the deliberately exaggerated figure of an ideal type, is one way that academic knowledge production can contribute to the rising wave of democratic dissent. In particular, the treatment of 'immaterial' or 'aesthetic' production stands to gain from this renewal of a radically negative critique. Those who admire the Frankfurt School, or, closer to us, the work of Michel Foucault, can hardly refuse the challenge of bringing their analyses up to date, at a time when the new system and style of domination has taken on crystal clear outlines.

Yet it is obvious that the mere description of a system of domination, however precise and scientifically accurate, will never suffice to dispel it. And the model of governmentality, with all its nuances, easily lends itself to infinite introspection, which would be better avoided. The timeliness of critical theory has to do with

the possibility of refusing a highly articulated and effective ideology, which has integrated and neutralised a certain number of formerly alternative proposals. But it is important to avoid the trap into which the Frankfurt School, in particular, seems to have fallen: the impasse of a critique so totalising that it leaves no way out, except through an excessively sophisticated, contemplative, and ultimately elitist aesthetics. Critique today must remain a fully public practice, engaged in communicative action and indeed, communicative activism: the re-creation of an oppositional culture, in forms specifically conceived to resist the inevitable attempts at co-optation.<sup>27</sup> The figure of the flexible personality can be publicly ridiculed, satirised, its supporting institutions can be attacked on political and economic grounds, its traits can be exposed in cultural and artistic productions, its description and the search for alternatives to its reign can be conceived not as another academic industry - and another potential locus of immaterial productivism - but instead as a chance to help create new forms of intellectual solidarity, a collective project for a better society. When it is carried out in a perspective of social transformation, the exercise of negative critique itself can have a powerful subjectivising force, it can become a way to shape oneself through the demands of a shared endeavour.<sup>28</sup>

The flexible personality is not a destiny. And despite the ideologies of resignation, despite the dense realities of governmental structures in our control societies, nothing prevents the sophisticated forms of critical knowledge, elaborated in the peculiar temporality of the university, from connecting directly with the new and also complex, highly sophisticated forms of dissent appearing on the streets. In the process, 'artistic critique' can again rejoin the refusal of exploitation. This type of crossover is exactly what we have seen in the wide range of movements opposing the agenda of neoliberal globalisation.<sup>29</sup> The development of an oppositional 'school' can now extend to a vastly wider field. The communicational infrastructure has been partially externalised into personal computers, and a considerable 'knowledge capital' has shifted from the schools and universities of the welfare state into the bodies and minds of immaterial labourers: these assets can be appropriated by all those willing to simply use what is already ours, and

to take the risks of political autonomy and democratic dissent. The history of radically democratic movements can be explored and deepened, while the goals and processes of the present movement are made explicit and brought openly into debate.

The program is ambitious. But the alternative, if you prefer, is just to go on playing someone else's game - always in the air, between vocation and vacation, eyes on the latest information, fingers on the controls. Rolling the loaded dice, again and again.

### 5

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## NOTES:

1. The World Social Forum, held for the first time in Porto Alegre in January 2001, is symbolic of the turn away from neoclassical or 'supply-side' economics. Another potent symbol can be found in the charges leveled by economist Joseph Stiglitz at his former employers, the World Bank, and even more importantly, at the IMF - the major transnational organ of the neoclassical doctrine.
2. For a short history of cultural studies as a popular-education movement, then a more theoretical treatment of its origins and potentials, see Williams (1989) 'The Future of Cultural Studies' and 'The Uses of Cultural Theory'.
3. See Hall & Jefferson, *et al.* (1993) *Resistance through Rituals*, especially the 'theoretical overview' of the volume (pp. 9-74).
4. The reversal becomes obvious with Grossberg *et al.*'s (1992) anthology that marks the large-scale exportation of cultural studies to the American academic market.
5. The methodological device of the ideal type was developed by Max Weber, particularly in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; as we shall see, it was taken up as a polemical figure by the Frankfurt School in the 1950s.
6. The term 'state capitalism' is more familiar as an indictment of false or failed communism of the Stalinist Soviet Union, for instance in Cliff (1974); however, the concept as developed by the Frankfurt School applied, with variations, to all the centrally planned economies that emerged after the Great Depression.
7. In the words of the Parisian *enragés*: 'What are the essential features of council power? Dissolution of all external power - Direct and total democracy - Practical unification of decision and execution - Delegates who can be revoked at any moment by those who have mandated them - Abolition of hierarchy and independent specialisations - Conscious management and transformation of all the conditions of liberated life - Permanent creative mass participation - Internationalist extension and coordination. The present requirements are nothing less than this. Self-management is nothing less.' From a 30 May, 1968 communiqué, signed ENRAGÉS-SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE, COUNCIL FOR MAINTAINING THE OCCUPATIONS, made available over the Internet by Ken Knabb <[www.slip.net/~knabb/SI/May68docs.htm](http://www.slip.net/~knabb/SI/May68docs.htm)>.
8. The origins of the 'conservative revolution' are described by Dixon (1998).
9. References to Harvey (1990: 25, 233).
10. The research inspired by the industrial innovations of Northern Italy is pervaded by culturalist or 'institutional' theories, holding that forms of economic organisation grow out of all-embracing social structures, often defined by reference to a premodern tradition. Such a reference is mystifying. As Antonio Negri writes: 'It is not the memory of former types of work that leads the overexploited laborers of massive Taylorist industries first to double employment, then to black-market labor, then to decentralized work and entrepreneurial initiative, but instead the struggle against the pace imposed by the boss in the factory, and the struggle against the union... It is only on the basis of the "refusal of work" as the motive force in this flight from the factory that one can understand certain characteristics initially taken on by decentralized labor.' (in Lazzarato 1993: 46)
11. Piore and Sabel did, of course, grasp the importance of programmable manufacturing tools in flexible production (1984: 26-20). More generally, they remark that 'the fascination of the computer - as documented in the ethnographic studies - is that the user can adapt it to his or her own purposes and habits of thought' (1984: 261); but they did not predict just how far this would go, i.e. how much of the new economy could be based on such a fascination.

12. For what follows, cf. esp. (1999: 208-85). The authors use Weberian methodology to propose a new ideal type of capitalist entrepreneur, 'connectionist man'. They do not systematically relate this ideal type to a new sociopolitical order and mode of production/consumption, nor do they grasp the full ambivalence determined by the origins of the flexible type in the period around 1968; but they provide an excellent description of the ideology that has emerged to neutralise that ambivalence.
13. Andrea Branzi, one of the North Italian designers who led and theorised this transition, distinguishes between the 'Homogeneous Metropolis' of mass-produced industrial design, and what he calls 'the Hybrid Metropolis, born of the crisis of classical modernity and of rationalism, which discovers niche markets, the robotization of the production line, the diversified series, and the ethnic and cultural minorities', from 'The Poetics of Balance: Interview with Andrea Branzi', in F. Burkhardt and C. Morozzi, Andrea Branzi (undated: 45) Paris: Editions Dis-Voir.
14. In *L'individu incertain*, sociologist Alain Ehrenberg describes the postwar regime of consumption as being 'characterized by a passive spectator fascinated by the [television] screen, with a dominant critique marked by the model of alienation.' He then links the positive connotations of the computer terminal in our own day to 'a model of communication promoting inter-individual exchanges modeled on themes of activity and relationships, with self-realization as the dominant stereotype of consumption' (1999: 240). Note the disappearance of critique in the second model.
15. The phrase 'selective tradition' is from Raymond William's essay 'When was Modernism?' (1989); this text and the one that follows constitute what is perhaps William's deepest meditation on capitalist alienation in the historical development of aesthetic forms.
16. In the text 'Immaterial Labour', Maurizio Lazzarato proposes the notion of aesthetic production: 'It is more useful, in attempting to grasp the process of the formation of social communication and its subsumption within the "economic," to use, rather than the "material" model of production, the "aesthetic" model that involves author, reproduction, and reception.... The "author" must lose its individual dimension and be transformed into an industrially organized production process (with a division of labor, investments, orders, and so forth), "reproduction" becomes a mass reproduction organized according to the imperatives of profitability, and the audience ("reception") tends to become the consumer/communicator.' (Lazzarato 1996: 144). The computer is the key instrument allowing for this industrial organization of the author function, in constant feedback relations with the communicating public.
17. Also see the excellent article by Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Du biopouvoir à la biopolitique', in *Multitudes 1* (45-57).
18. For an analysis of the ways that (self-) censorship operates in contemporary cultural production, see Corsani *et al.* (1996: 71-8).
19. Compare Sennet's discussion of a 1991 US government report on the skills people need in a flexible economy: 'in flexible forms of work, the players make up the rules as they go along... past performance is no guide to present rewards; in each office "game" you start over from the beginning' (Sennet 1998: 110).
20. Can research work in cultural studies, such as Dick Hebdige's classic *Subculture, The Meaning of Style*, now be directly instrumentalised by marketing specialists? As much is suggested in Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland's *Commodify Your Dissent*, where Frank and Dave Mulcahey present a fictional 'buy recommendation' for would-be stock-market investors: 'Consolidated Deviance, Inc. ("ConDev") is unarguably the nation's leader, if not the sole force, in the fabrication, consultancy, licensing and merchandising of deviant subcultural practice. With its string of highly successful "SubCults™", mass-marketed youth culture campaigns highlighting rapid stylistic turnover and heavy cross-media accessorization, ConDev has brought

the allure of the marginalized to the consuming public.' (1997: 73-7)

21. 'The triple imperative of the Empire is incorporate, differentiate, manage'.

22. Cf. the section on 'Multinational Keynesianism' (1984: 252-7).

23. 'Une crise sans précédent ébranle l'informatique mondiale,' *Le Monde*, 13 June (2001: 18).

24. The ultimate reason for this tolerance appears to be fear. The labor psychologist Christophe Dejours studies the 'banalization of evil' in contemporary management. Beyond the cases of perverse or paranoid sadism, concentrated at the top, he identifies the imperative to display courage and virility as the primary moral justification for doing the 'dirty work' (selection for layoffs, enforcement of productivity demands, etc.):

'The collective strategy of defense entails a denial of the suffering occasioned by the "nasty jobs".... The ideology of economic rationalism consists... - beyond the exhibition of virility - in making cynicism pass for force of character, for determination and an elevated sense of collective responsibilities... in any case, for a sense of supra-individual interests.' (1998: 109-11)  
Underlying the defense mechanisms, Dejours finds both fear of personal responsibility and fear of becoming a victim oneself (1998: 89-118).

25. The story of the Yes Men is told by RtMark, *Corporate Consulting for the 21st Century*, at <<http://www.rtmark.com>>; or go directly to <<http://www.theyesmen.org/finland>>.

26. The notion that contemporary transnational capitalism legitimates itself and renders itself desirable through a 'culture-ideology' is developed by Sklair (2001) in *The Transnational Capitalist Class*.

27. Hence the paradoxical, yet essential refusal to conceive oppositional political practice as the constitution of a party, and indeed of a unified social class, for the seizure of state power. Among the better formulations of this paradox is Miguel Benasayag and Diego Sztulwark's *Du contre-pouvoir*. It is no coincidence that the book also deals with the possibility of transforming the modes of knowledge production:

'The difference lies less in belonging or not to a state structure like the university, than in the articulation with alternative dynamics that coproduce, rework and distribute the forms of knowledge. That must be done in sites of "minority" (i.e. "non-hegemonic") counter-power, which can gradually participate in the creation of a powerful and vibrant bloc of counter-power.' (2000: 113)

28. The notion of a new emulation, on an ethical basis, between free and independent subjects seems a far more promising future for the social tie than any restoration of traditional authority. Richard Sennet doesn't hide a certain nostalgia for the latter in *The Corrosion of Character* (1998: 115-6); but he remarks, far more interestingly, that in 'the process view of community... reflected in current political studies of deliberative democracy... the evolving expression of disagreement is taken to bind people more than the sheer declaration of "correct" principles' (1998: 143-4).

29. For a glimpse into the way intellectuals, activists, workers, and artists can cooperate in dissenting actions, see Susan George's 'Fixing or nixing the WTO' (2000).

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## HERITAGE

### The Yes Men

- + Louise, Mike, and Andy decide to attend the Heritage Foundation's annual Resource Bank meeting at the Renaissance hotel in Chicago, April 29-30, 2004.

Heritage is the biggest free-market think tank - in fact the biggest think tank period - in Washington. It has a budget of \$25 million and provides 'talking points' to conservative Congressmen who don't have time to do their own research. Heritage is a kind of 'grey eminence' behind Congress, and very actively helps direct US politics.

And what a bunch of radicals these folks are! Like the rare ultra-anarchist, they basically want to 'smash the state' - but unlike such anarchists, they're rich, not so rare, and succeeding.

Heritage is very up-front about these goals. Paul Krugman and others have pointed out that the goal of the Bush administration seems to be to bankrupt the federal government; the Heritage Foundation indeed announces this vision up front: 'Too many conservatives lose hope', writes Heritage president Edwin J. Feulner. 'They doubt that the liberal welfare state can be brought to collapse... In short, they doubt that The Heritage Foundation's Vision for America can be achieved.' (By 'liberal welfare state' he means Social Security, the Department of Education, and so on - but not the Department of Defence. Read on.)



*This way to begin*

### Thursday, April 29

In order to register (free) for the Heritage conference, we've formed a right-wing think tank (\$12 for the domain name). We've also registered for (free) table space, so when we arrive at the hotel we immediately go looking for an open table to display our wares: a foot-long Roman warship (\$30) and some insane but fully fact-based 'position papers'. (Yes, the Bush Administration really has contemplated wafting oceans of chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere to help along global warming.) We eventually find an empty spot, next to the Cato Institute and not far from a table featuring books like *Eco-Imperialism: Green Power*, *Black Death* and *How Union Bosses Have Hijacked Our Government*.

The event teems with 650 smiling, friendly and blandly-dressed people hired by well-endowed think tanks fighting 'socialistic' ideas: the Jesse Helms Institute, the Hoover Institution, the Atlas Foundation (based on the books of Ayn Rand), the Society for the Economic Study of Religion (which, a young representative tells us, has determined that Pentecostalism is the best religion for a free market, and so sends missionaries to Africa), and so on.

We dive deeper and deeper into the remarkable logic of conservative thought. For lunch, as brown-skinned people serve us chicken, millionaire money-manager Derwood Chase tells us about his personal efforts to help keep taxes down and end the government handouts that make people fat and lazy. Throughout the



*We visit our hosts*

*We come well-prepared*

*Andy admires the mascot*

rest of the day, we attend foray after stultifying foray into the importance of bringing US 'socialism' (public education, public health care, Social Security) to an end. There's even a foreigner: a Chilean economist who describes the wonders of Chile's development since Pinochet.

After lunch, some young protesters wearing ostrich suits demand that lawmakers get their heads out of the sand and fix Social Security. When asked about their concept, the ostriches shrug and send us to a spokesperson for the lobby group 'For Our Grandchildren', who reluctantly explains that the protesters are temps, hired that morning. 'For Our Grandchildren', it turns out, wants to 'reform' social security by letting people choose to invest wherever they want to. Perhaps their most visionary claim: Social Security is unfair to African Americans because 'African Americans have lower life expectancies than other Americans. This means that in Social Security's live-long-or-lose-out program, most African Americans lose out'. That's right: since African Americans have shorter life expectancies, we should get rid of the programme that would help them in the unlikely event they make it to retirement age. We go over to the young African American woman in the ostrich suit and ask if she knows she's protesting against social security. 'Against it?' she says, confused. 'No, we want to fix it!' Not wanting to make a scene so early in this two-day affair, we put our heads in the sand and move on.



*Louise and Andy study our own position papers*

*Lots of weirder stuff to read, too*

*Protesting to kill Social Security*

We (and the 650 other zealots) end the day with a delicious (free) dinner hosted by Ed Meese, Attorney General under Reagan, most famous for his role in the Iran-contra scandal. The topic of the evening is 'School Choice' - providing private-school vouchers instead of public-school funding - and the speakers enthusiastically let us know that public education is one of the things they intend to 'bring to collapse' because of the way it churns out Marxists (sic).

Finally, Meese presents the Salvatori Prize in American Citizenship to Virginia Walden-Ford, a woman who has managed to extract her son from DC's already gutted public education system via 'School Choice', for which she is an ardent lobbyist. Now her son's in Iraq, with the Marines: standing ovation.

We toast the whole thing with glass after glass of free wine and later, accompanying the Heartland Institute's lovely desserts, drinks. The alcohol makes us punchy. When a publisher from Sacramento described the beauty of 'population control by market forces,' we strain in vain to muster a suitable reply. We do better with the Cayman Islands booster guy: when he explains that the Cayman Islands is able to have such 'enlightened' pro-business laws because it's basically just 'a rock', we burst out: 'How can we make this country a rock?!' Later he explains the importance of the Iraq war by asking rhetorically, 'What if we hadn't gone into Grenada?' 'What if?' we ask. 'Then Grenada would have become a dependency of Cuba', he explains. 'Right!' we exclaim. 'And if we hadn't gone into Iraq, it would



*Ed Meese presents an award*

*The recipient*

have become a dependency of the USSR'. 'Right!' the Cayman guy says, before (presumably) realising the absurdity of the concept.

Finally, as we're leaving the hotel, we go up to the Chilean who had explained his country's miraculous economy and gush: 'That was fantastic! We want to bring Pinochet to America!' Our public-education brains are now in fine shape for thinking up what to do tomorrow.

### **Friday, April 30**

The next day, Friday, we arrive just in time for the closing luncheon and another installment of free food. This time we sit right up near the front, so that we can be close to the stage - and Ed Meese. A few minutes after the opening prayer and Pledge of Allegiance (in that order), as the salad is being replaced by the main course, we make our move.

The sound of a wine glass being dinged by a spoon fills the banquet room (the microphone has been left on). The conversation of 650 zealots ceases as Andy, his face filling two screens on either side, announces a toast.

To that very brave woman, Virginia Walden-Ford, who yesterday proved to us that through individual initiative and free markets, all of us can rescue our children from shoddy government education so they can learn what they need in



*Andy nominates Ed Meese for President*



*Meese listens*



*Unable to finish*



*Finally, the gorilla*

order to compete in a free American marketplace.

But there is a nine-hundred pound gorilla in the room. Instead of fighting in the free American marketplace, this brave woman's son is fighting for what I think we all, or many of us here agree is a case of crony corporate welfare, a market distortion on a truly gigantic scale.

Ms. Walden-Ford's story convinced me that our political choices in the next election are simply not adequate. And I propose that on this historic anniversary of The Road to Serfdom, we take a giant step for Hayek's free markets by drafting a real free-markets candidate. And why not Ed Meese?

To the next President and Commander-in-Chief of the United States of America, Ed Meese III!

Meese, sitting directly in front of the podium, screws up his face very strangely as he hears his nomination. Applause rings out for nearly ten seconds.

Later, Mike dons a gorilla suit (rental: \$20) and tries to get attendees to sign a 'draft Meese' petition until he's kicked out by angry Heritage employees. (Fee for dropped gorilla foot that Heritage person refuses to return: \$10.)

All that remains is to get the hell out, and to tell the world what great, cheap fun this can be...





## THE MOOD OF NETWORKING CULTURE

Jeremy Valentine

- + 'The great socialist project - the dream of handing power over to the people - is being realized in front of our eyes. It is being realized not by the disciples of communism, but by the preachers of free enterprise and market capitalism. None of this has anything to do with politics. We are simply talking about the logical consequences of the forces of funk.' (Ridderstråle & Nordstrøm 1994)

'One could say that the heraldic motto of post-fordism is, rightfully, "politics above all." After all, what else could the discourse of "total quality" mean, if not a request to surrender to production a taste for action, the capacity to face the possible and the unforeseen, the capacity to communicate something new?' (Virno 2004: 63)

After the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979 [1947]), Adorno revisited the relation between culture and means-ends rationality which had provided the practical subjective side of the notion of 'culture industry', in order to see if things were really as bad as he and Horkheimer had originally thought. In this second attempt Adorno emphasises the conflict between bureaucratic and administrative rationality, as described by Max Weber in *Economy and Society* (1979), and autonomous aesthetic judgment described by Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Judgment* (1987 [1790]), at the expense of the conflict between the Taylorisation of industrial production and everyday life and the 'tribunal of pure reason' imagined by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1929), which

organised the themes of the earlier text. In doing so Adorno found more room for manoeuvre. The essay begins with the startling statement that 'whoever speaks of culture speaks of administration as well, whether that is his intention or not' (1991: 93). Adorno makes this claim as a way of explaining the underlying reality of a situation in which culture has become the common denominator of everything. This is a consequence of the triumph of administrative rule for which culture functions as a general equivalence, and through which everything can be arranged, assembled, distributed and evaluated. These circumstances are not met with Adorno's rigorous negative dialectic but instead offer the opportunity for a more pragmatic response because:

'It is neither possible to accept uncritically the concept of culture, long permeated by ideas of departmentalisation, nor to continue to shake one's head conservatively about what is being done to culture in the age of integral organisation.' (1991: 94)

Adorno's optimism stems from the fact that administrative rationality necessarily establishes its own limits in order to secure the conditions of action. These limits, while not exterior to the exercise of administrative rule, provide opportunities for action which are not immediately subsumed by administration and which serve to advance the interest of culture in its own autonomy. Although the Weberian destiny of bureaucratic expansion entailed that administration had become an autonomous end in itself, the growth of specialists in administration required that administrative domination was exercised over substantive areas in which administration possessed no particular knowledge or competence. Not only does this involve the disruption of an objective link between means and ends that administration seeks to implement, but also the emergence of a bureaucratic nightmare in the form of a conflict between 'the sacrosanct irrationality of culture' and its conditions. For Adorno the situation is encapsulated in the following antinomian structure:

'The demand made by administration on culture is essentially heteronomous: culture - no matter what form it takes - is to be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but rather with

some types of abstract standards imposed from without, while at the same time the administrative instance - according to its own prescriptions and nature - must for the most part refuse to become involved in questions of immanent quality with regard to the truth of the thing itself or its objective bases in general.' (1991: 98)

Instead of trying to resolve this antinomy through an antagonism which would affirm the autonomy of culture against administrative domination, and in which, it must be said, culture would be beaten easily, Adorno suggests that culture should become enlightened and self-consciously grasp the antinomy as a basis for action. Doing so entails rejecting the desire for emancipation from material conditions as this only leads to disavowal and neutralisation, and rejecting the belief that artistic content, especially when it means the denunciation of everything institutional and official, constitutes a vanguard movement against administration from a position radically exterior to it. Such 'manifestations of extreme artistry' are easily tolerated. Instead, Adorno suggests that administration is not necessarily bad, and that any bad can be weighed against the good through which administration provides the conditions for culture as a collective endeavour. This is regulated by bureaucratic principles of equity preventing arbitrariness, nepotism, blind control, favouritism and other forms of corruption. On this basis the antinomy of culture and administration could be mediated by cultural experts who would decide on the conflicting requirements of the system and the object under a duty to 'uphold the interests of the public against the public itself'. By creating 'centres of freedom' in this way a non-reified 'spontaneous consciousness' can intervene and alter the function of administration and encourage a difference and divergence from the requirements of the system. Adorno condensed this position in the slogan, 'the planning of the non-planned'.

For Adorno, culture is subsumed under the logic of strategic-relational political action; a concept derived by combining Gramsci's distinction between 'war of position' and 'war of movement' in order to establish an underlying common

element (Jessop 1982). That is to say, some elements of a given situation may be considered structural insofar as they cannot be changed by the action of an agent, and may well constrain the actions that can be taken, or even determine them. Similarly, some elements of a given situation may be conjunctural, and thus enable opportunities for relatively autonomous action, that in consequence alter what is to count as structural and may transform it into something conjunctural. What Adorno did not realise was that the real 'vocation' of administration is to act in this way, and not under the authority of some regulative 'code of conduct'. What he also did not anticipate was that such a mode of action would become commonplace, and that this would happen as a consequence of the triumph of culture over administration. The notion of culture has become generalised such that administration is subsumed within it. Administration has become the site of emergence for contingent acts of 'cultural entrepreneurship' because culture is no longer a sphere external to administration. Administration has not eliminated culture. Rather, administration has become culture. Organisation is no longer the structure defined by procedures and grounded in reason. Rather, organisation has become an anthropology striving to represent itself as such. By the same token, culture in Adorno's specific sense of 'aesthetic value' has become reduced to the general level of anthropological phenomena associated with the bourgeoisie of advanced capitalist societies, and which has no privileged relation to the equally anthropological culture of the 'culture industries'.

How have these dialectical twists come about? In their bestseller *Empire* (2001) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the dynamic of the contemporary world in terms of the convergence of two distinct processes. On the one hand a constant de-structuring of existing organisational forms, and on the other a constant production of difference at the cultural level. It would be a mistake to explain either of these forces by means of the other. Of course investment in organisational structures is unwise under circumstances where Capital creates the conditions of its own economic uncertainty. Yet equally those who inhabit such structures, from corporate offices to social housing schemes, resist, subvert and disengage from the disciplines they impose and that create costs Capital can

only seek to displace. Through such means the conventional distinction between the sphere of organisation and administration, and the sphere of culture as both 'everyday life' and aesthetic experience, has become harder to maintain and the resulting fluidity and indeterminacy becomes a resource for the production and maintenance of Empire itself. As evidence of this phenomena the authors point to the self-help literary genre of airport, or perhaps 'airhead', management books with titles like *Thriving on Chaos* and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. They also point to government announcements to 'reinvent' itself by accepting its contingency through the introduction of pseudo-markets in its machinery and that of the services it provides, such as health, law, education and combat. Within popular culture one could also refer to the thematics of 'the crisis of organisational certainty and its subjective effects' in such hit TV shows as HBO's melodrama *The Sopranos* and BBC's comedy *The Office*. Recall too the explanation of 'the legendary pirate's code' in *Pirates of the Caribbean* as 'more what you'd call guidelines than actual rules'.<sup>1</sup> Culture is a resource because everything is made up as it goes along, as if the sociological discoveries of Garfinkelian ethnomethodology - which demonstrated that organisation was not the effect of some anonymous transcendent structure but was made up from the mundane and changing interactions of people - have become the reflexive, but not *reflective*, common sense of everyday life (Garfinkel 1967; Lash 2002).

Whereas moderns had put all their energy in trying to create a hierarchical world modelled on the pre-modern order of being, in either its Greek or Christian versions - and which had been destroyed by the modern realisation that 'we can do this ourselves, only better, and without God's say so or metaphysical guarantees' - people today do not wait around for a picture that would represent to them how the world is, they just get on with it. What they do is network in the sense of making and unmaking contingent relationships between others and between material and immaterial things, in order to pursue 'goals' that change according to the last move in the relationship. The required tactic is to avoid getting locked into relationships and to avoid 'path dependency' at all costs. Conflict is something to be avoided too, because it is better to go around an obstacle rather

than to confront it head on - not necessarily because of cowardice, but because of the opportunity-cost of getting bogged down in an argument which might never be resolved. Life is too short to worry about being right.

Following Althusser we might say that whereas the ideological form of address that kept people in their place under modern capitalism was modelled on the police 'hey, you', today's typical form of address is the ambivalent 'is there a problem?' of the customer service or human resources manager (Althusser 1971). This ensures people are kept out of any place, at least if they are sensible. Getting trapped in that sort of 'dialogue' might mean doing or, worse, buying something you didn't want. Whereas for Althusser the paradigmatic scenes in which individuals got themselves caught up in ideology were the rituals of kneeling and praying perfected by the Christians, then today it is the 'team meeting' where 'everyone makes a valuable contribution', or better, the seminar on 'neuro-linguistic programming' or 'transactional analysis'. In fact, it is probably no longer realistic to talk about ideology at all if this means a systematically distorted view of the world produced by capital in order that people misunderstand their place in it. For example, Slavoj Žižek has recently drawn attention to the significance of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and thus of the prohibitions and taboos that it anchored. In the light of Althusser's adoption of Lacan's interpretation of Freud, this functions as an explanatory ground of ideology, as it provides a theory of the formation of subjectivity out of a simultaneous moment of insertion into a subordinate position in a relation of subjection (Žižek 2000). This development does not mean that people suddenly acquire a transparent epistemological relation to the truth. Rather, 'any symbolic point of reference that would serve as a safe and unproblematic moral anchor' disappears (2000: 332). Action is no longer orientated to the true/false, right/wrong distinction. Žižek's diagnosis is ambivalent. On the one hand this situation explains the proliferation of rules and committees to decide on trivial matters such as sexual etiquette in order, precisely, to minimise risk. Yet on the other hand, nowhere does Žižek show how any of this adds up to a unified symbolic whole precisely because the mechanism that would make that possible, the Oedipus complex, no longer exists. Which

is why - despite the revisionist claim that all psychoanalysis has ever done is describe an anthropology of 'the unexpected consequences of the disintegration of traditional structures that regulated libidinal life' (2000: 341) - Žižek bemoans the narcissism and immaturity of 'young people'. He does this to establish the moral desirability of 'traditional structures' if only as something to be against, and despite the fact that they have never existed outside the dreams of Victorian amateur anthropologists.

All of this is bad news for Critical Theory and its take on Culture and culture. To see just how bad we can turn to the punk-rock scholasticism of the contemporary followers of Spinoza, and in particular Virno's recent attempt to elaborate the subjectivity of the multitude, a category also deployed by Hardt and Negri, amongst others, to designate the being and acting of post-fordist network culture (Virno, 2004).<sup>3</sup> For Virno, the traditional distinction between work, action and thought has dissolved. Labour is no longer productive, barely distinguishable from unemployment, insofar as its outcome is service which creates relations of 'personal dependence'. Idleness has become 'the pivot of contemporary production' (2004:89) insofar as practices of communication have been reduced to a purely phatic function. Yet despite the fact that making and unmaking relationships has become the source of surplus value sufficient to keep the need for the old economies ticking along, none of this is visible from within the traditional concepts of political economy and its critique. Hence the growth of contingent organisational practices and their technologies which supplement existing financial accountancy and managerial practices in order to try and represent these phenomena. Being as immaterial and service-based as the values they seek to understand, they stimulate their own growth and expansion by deepening the lack of objectivity in the old economy by revealing its dependence on relationships it did not know it had and which it might now lose; for example, with an identity, and above all with culture. Auditing is perhaps one of the most well-known names for such practices which both invents new needs for organisations and invents measures to represent their absence in order to verify their claims (Kimbell 2002: parallax 2004; Power 1997) .

Of particular importance for Virno's thesis is the suggestion that whereas the culture industries were formerly considered economically marginal, they have now become central. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the culture industries create values that have no relation to the costs of production. Secondly, the culture industries provide a training in working with immaterial values and establishing and destroying networks of personal dependence. In the absence of quantitative measuring sticks, work becomes a Machiavellian politics of impression management in order to invent and maintain power (Wernick 1991). Culture, especially through its subversion of communication as a practice of achieving rational agreement for collective actions, has become 'the industry of the means of production'. In the absence of routines tied down to the certainty of long-run production cycles, the culture industries provide a 'training in precariousness and variability' (Virno 2004: 85). Indeed, much of this training goes on outside the formal spaces of production in the haphazard realm of private and social experiences and draws on the types of subjectivity that these require. Here Virno emphasises a combination of opportunism and cynicism. The first celebrates the qualities of those 'who confront a flow of ever-interchangeable possibilities, making themselves available to the greater number of these, yielding to the nearest one, and then quickly swerving from one to another' (2004: 86). The second combines this practical promiscuity with a calculated detachment that recognises the conventional and groundless nature of the structures of action simply used as occasions for 'brutal and arrogant' self-affirmation (2004: 88).

Left-wing and liberal reactions to the descriptions of Virno, Hardt and Negri generally follow the predictable cycle of denial, anger and revenge. In doing so, they converge with the right-wing and conservative reaction to the loss of its own certainties, issuing in a sort of 'left-wing fogginess'. Particularly provocative is the argument that the multitude arises from below as a problem for order and the forms which it takes: bureaucratic discipline, the social contract between state and civil society, and obligations to moral conscience. The multitude is not concerned to oppose these phenomena, nor is it concerned to demonstrate

obedience to subjection. Neither is the multitude equivalent to some benign notion of the subordinate people opposed to the dominant 'power-bloc'. Instead the action of the multitude is described as evasion and 'exit.'

Of course, no one would dispute the proposition that the forms in which the multitude exists derive from the developments of Capital. Yet both Virno, and Hardt and Negri, explain that it is the multitude's desire for the products of Capital, the aristocratic virtues of leisure and enjoyment over the slave vices of work and misery, that serves to undermine Capital precisely because it cannot satisfy the demand it stimulates. Hence social struggles increasingly revolve around the question of who is to pay for this. It is worth remembering that the acceleration of debt that sustains Capital will never be paid off, especially as national economic systems have come to rely on it. Neither will the financial responsibility for theft as a strategy of consumption be accepted by the perpetrators, whether this concerns white trash chancers who swipe a laptop from Starbucks or 'soccer moms' who switch the price labels in designer shops. And although much has been made of the invention of self-responsibility as a strategy of corporate and public government, no one should expect any of it to work. Its purpose is simply to provide employment for experts in symbolic communication.

With these points in mind perhaps we should recall Virno's account of the origins of post-fordism in the spontaneous outbreaks of 'refusal' which occurred in Italy in 1977. Although this phenomenon made an important contribution it should not downplay the significance of the destructive and antagonistic noise that erupted in the suburbs of Britain in the same year. By honouring the year zero of punk we can perhaps comprehend how 'Nihilism (the practice of not having established practices, etc.) has entered into production, has become a professional qualification, and has been *put to work*.' (2004: 85; original emphasis). After all, to be a slave to a god which does not exist is against our rights and dignity.

**NOTES:**

1. The words of Captain Barbossa (played by Geoffrey Rush) in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (USA, 2003).

2. For more information, see <<http://www.generation-online.org>>.

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## AN ECONOMY OF LOVE

Marysia Lewandowska & Neil Cummings

- + In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979 [1947]) Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer developed an influential critical theory that analysed the effects of new forms of mass culture on society. Adorno and Horkheimer suggested that in a society driven by relationships of production, there was an inevitable drive for capital to extend itself into leisure, consumption and communication, and eventually the space remaindered by labour - that of culture - would begin to obey the rules of production just like any other industry. Through this trajectory, they reverse the traditional liberal view of culture within society; the evolution of capitalism through culture could no longer hold the promise of freedom, but offers only ever tighter discipline and domination. Adorno and Horkheimer's influential thesis has passed into common knowledge, but there is another, perhaps an even more sinister vector we would have to add to their trajectory. In recent years, as much as culture has become a re-productive industry, due to the shift in emphasis from the manufacturing of material goods towards the sale of intangible products like services, information and loyalty, there has been a seductive cultural ambition emerging in the 'economy'. The new 'cultural' status of the economy has become a mirror reflection of the economically determined character of culture; the 'market' has become an aesthetic experience in and of itself.

If capital dissolves the historical dialectic between work and leisure, production and culture, or production and consumption, then many of the traditional

theoretical tools bequeathed by Karl Marx for modelling our political economy - like Labour Value or purposeful rationality - lose their critical purchase. Labour might now be reproduced for the sake of the reproduction of labour itself - like paying subsidies to farmers not to harvest their produce. The much derided sociologist Jean Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* attempts to develop new theoretical tools to deal with what he considers as 'The Structural Revolution of Value' (1993: 6). The hypertheorist Baudrillard reaches far back to archaic forms of symbolic exchange, and particularly *the gift*, to animate forces capable of contesting the power of contemporary capital. Through money, commodity exchange establishes arbitrary quantitative differences between things, expressed as the price someone is prepared to pay; it is an abstract system of general equivalences. It is this arbitrary equivalence that enables capital to infect all spheres of a given society, and that allows Baudrillard to make the leap to de Saussurian linguistics by characterising capital as predicated on semiotic exchange. In absolute contrast, gift or symbolic exchange establishes personal qualitative relations between the people transacting. While money cancels obligations between people and things, gifts establish obligations between people through things. Within commodity or semiotic exchange the desire for the object - let's imagine some beautiful shoes - is an extension of the subject extinguished at the point of consumption; the gift object fuses the subject to another through relationships that can never be disentangled, exhausted or made equitable. In many respects the gift is the source of the very idea of an economy itself. While the ideal gift is replete with love and generosity - like blood donation - the gift also carries a destructive power. The unreciprocated gift is a constant reminder of indebtedness, and if the gift cannot be forgotten - and it can never be forgotten - it turns vengeful and nurtures hatred; those who receive a gift are always beholden to the giver.

### **On Capital**

Our project *Capital* was developed at Tate Modern (May-October 2001), aiming to reflect the Tate's immediate environment, its geographical location, the social and cultural environment in Southwark, and more generally London. The

ambition and power of the Tate is made evident in its different departments and components: Tate St Ives, Tate Liverpool, Tate Britain and Modern, the vast stores in high-security but nondescript industrial buildings in south London, the archive of the artworld that it is buying from artists, galleries and other institutions; the best art library in Britain, huge conservation department, vast art handling, aggressive publicity and development; and its huge educational ambition - from working with teachers and schools, to conferences with internationally renowned writers, historians, theorists and artists. The practice of exhibition, the most public of faces of Tate, is a mere sliver of its activities. With its huge cultural ambition and image in the public consciousness, the Tate may resemble in some ways a central bank: a central bank in a different kind of economy, what Baudrillard and others designate as a *symbolic economy*; something perhaps like the Bank of England.

### **Bank**

The Bank of England is the banker to the whole British financial system and also plays a major role in structuring global monetary relations. This major role is essentially as the 'lender of last resort'. This means the Bank will decide to rescue an ailing financial institution if its economists fear a systemic collapse, or a catastrophic loss of confidence in the whole British or world financial system. The role as 'lender of last resort' gives the Bank the authority to guarantee the necessary trust and confidence, to secure the various interlocking domestic, foreign commodity and financial markets. In short, it regulates or distributes trust and confidence through these various economies, by managing the availability and price of debt. Effectively it adjusts the cost of borrowing to accelerate or decelerate the flow of capital debt into the markets, with cuts or raises in interest rates. And this debt, this black hole, this lack that the Bank manages the price of, is principally the government's.

Managing the price of government debt was the function that founded the bank in 1694. When William of Orange and Queen Mary jointly ascended the throne of England in 1689 they needed cash money to continue the war with France in

William's homeland of the Netherlands. The government Exchequer declined, so a group of people got together to form a joint-stock company and on-lent money to the king in return for the loan with interest, but also (eventually) for a royal charter to enable the fledgling company to issue paper notes. The Bank, later to become the Bank of England is founded upon a debt, and *the continuation* of this debt, or the continuation of the repayment of this debt, is the motor of our present domestic and international financial economies. It would be fair to say that our global financial structure is fueled by debt repayments.<sup>1</sup>

The rise of the joint stock company in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century coincided with new ways of capitalising assets through extending credit, and creating debt; like the speculation in all manner of commodities - from slaves to tulips, and the investment in various immaterial potentials - like New Worlds. Debt, the evil twin of credit becomes a key feature in the imaginary of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century - it's a figure of anxiety because there are terrifying debtors prisons, and yet it's a source of hope; it can drive a whole nation's economy.<sup>2</sup>

Linked to the cost of loan to the king, was the Bank's demand to issue notes ('paper money') in return for a Royal Charter. Previously all value found its form, as, or in relationship to gold. A coin, for instance, would *embody* the actual value in material, as that depicted on its face. These new paper notes, colloquially referred to as 'imaginary money' had little intrinsic value but were contractual agreements against which objects or services could be bought or sold for the value *represented*.<sup>3</sup> Of course these paper promises were backed by gold in the vaults. The 'I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of ten pounds' printed - and still printed - on British paper notes implied that you could present the note at the bank and retrieve your ten pounds of gold. Paper money linked to credit was in its social impact like the internet of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It multiplied previously untapped sources of value because Government debts could be incurred against assets such as stocks of merchandise, or even potential stocks, tax receipts, revenues on land or commercial contracts, and money issued against these potentials. These new, let's call them 'obligations' against which

credit or 'imaginary money' could be advanced and distributed, speeded up and exponentially expanded the economy, and to all intensive purposes '*doubled the Effect of our coined Money*'.<sup>4</sup> Money became backed by a collective act of faith, trust and obligation.

The Bank began to undertake what is called a 'Fiduciary issue', a term to denominate paper money in circulation which is no longer backed by bullion in the vaults;<sup>5</sup> money which is authorised by other paper promises, to pay, sell or loan services, debts, trades and obligation at some point in the future. It is clear that the dematerialisation of value from gold to paper was continuing out into new instruments and technologies. The first telegraph was installed between the bank in London and another in Hamburg in 1845 to swap stock and currency prices; the first Atlantic telegraph in 1858, and by 1877 telegraphic transfers had overtaken the Bill of Exchange as a means of inter-government remittance. These are the roots of our virtual money, as communication accelerated the means by which value is transacted - the first credit card introduced in 1950 - trust and confidence moves from the material object, to the institutions that evolve to construct, guarantee and manage value through particular economies. Released from the post World War II Bretton-Woods agreement in 1971, and devolved of political management during the unprecedented 'free market' ideology of the 1980s, financial markets have grown exponentially in their size, ubiquity and liquidity.<sup>6</sup> The current scale of the principal markets that trade currency, bonds, stock, derivatives and commodities, are staggering. For example, the turnover on the currency markets alone are estimated at one trillion dollars a day, which means that in two months the volume of trade dwarfs the annual turnover from manufacturing and retail of the entire planet.

And yet, ironically, the dematerialisation of financial value has accelerated the penetration of the 'market' into all aspects of contemporary life, into healthcare, education, transportation, culture and broadcasting which - in Britain at least - were previously State funded and so protected from the vagaries of the 'market'. And even if the use of money is inappropriate as a disciplinary system, our ever

expanding cultures of audit, service, quality assurance and account use the language of capital to regulate all kinds of social exchange. Values expressed as money haunt everything; a punch line in a popular TV advert suggests 'we are all bank managers now' and another that 'we are all fluent in finance'.<sup>7</sup> So, as the signs for financial value become increasingly vast but immaterial, does the central Bank's role as guarantor grow inversely to compensate?

### Tate

On the other side of the same coin/note, would it be possible to situate the Tate - through its ambition and constant expansion - as the principal institution in a parallel Symbolic Economy?<sup>8</sup> Like the Bank, Tate connects with a vast network of other institutions and agencies; from museums, galleries, curators, collectors, dealers, to various funding and sponsoring bodies both nationally and internationally, that make up the global economy of art. Does the Tate guarantee the integrity and value of the artworks - the objects, images, experiences and knowledge it stores, collects and distributes within this economy? And, in a close parallel with a central bank, is its basic currency becoming increasingly insubstantial, and difficult to represent - artworks and images are dissolving into digital media, fieldwork and activism? If artworks are indeed becoming less materially present - partly as a consequence of artistic practice, it also stems from the dissemination of 'aesthetic experience' beyond the regulated symbolic economy, out into the culture of promotion, sponsorship, branding, Cities of Culture status, economic regeneration, advertising and marketing. For instance, the Unilever Turbine hall commission at Tate Modern, Egg the online bank's 'live art' sponsorship at Tate Modern, and Tate have also issued a range of paints through the B&Q DIY superstores. Clearly, values expressed through image and information haunt everything. And as the signs of aesthetic value become increasingly immaterial, does the Museum's role as regulator and guarantor grow inversely to compensate?

If the Tate and the Bank have more similarities than differences, there is a major structural difference. The Tate was founded by a gift from Sir Henry Tate, in

1887. From a family of sugar refiners and slave traders, Sir Henry bought the rights to manufacture sugar cubes, and like many 19<sup>th</sup> Century merchants made so much money he did not know what to do with it; he founded hospitals, colleges, libraries, and collected works of art.<sup>9</sup> And again, like many wealthy collectors, he donated his collection of modern British art to the nation as a gift when he neared the end of his life. He also donated funds to build a new gallery to house the collection on the site of an old penitentiary at Millbank on the Thames in London - now Tate Britain. And although it was officially called the Gallery of British Art, it inevitably took its founders name.<sup>10</sup>

### The Gift

The contested idea of the gift has been a central theme in anthropology since Marcel Mauss' seminal publication *The Gift* (1950) and more recently its influence has been profound in the other social sciences. Mauss' work on the gift - a gift received by Baudrillard and returned in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* - proposes an economy outside or alongside of the calculations encouraged by the purely financial. The gift economy predates money and yet has not been erased by its presence. Receiving a gift triggers the obligation to reciprocate; the counter gift necessitates a return, and so on, endlessly. Pierre Bourdieu's reworking of the idea of the gift suggests that one of its astonishing characteristics is our ability to 'misrecognise' giving as a disinterested gesture; we pretend it is replete with charity while actually it is a gesture of power and domination (1997: 231).<sup>11</sup> If the gift is surrounded by indebtedness and obligation, these are contractual agreements which cannot be recognised as such, and so the 'return' of the gift is left unspecified. Therefore an economy founded on gifting is based on the misrecognition of the financial value, or the social and cultural force that the gift entails; it is an un-economic economy, a symbolic economy.

Clearly the Tate and virtually all other public museums and galleries are completely indebted to private, public and corporate gifting; most public collections are the result of endless private gifts of art, and many public institutions rely on financial gifts to meet exhibition and running costs. These patterns of gifting bind cultural

institutions into economic networks of obligation and indebtedness, obscured from public scrutiny. This in itself is further complicated by the enormous growth in sponsorship: exchanges where some of the repayments on the apparent gift are specified - my logo on your publicity - but others, as with the true gift, are left unspecified.<sup>12</sup> In an economy of value represented by the movement of money, a debt guarantees a contractual and interested return. That's why a loan is never misunderstood as a gift. As debt drives our financial systems, the gift is at the heart of our cultural economies.

The gesture of authorising the giving of the gift in the project *Capital*, was using public money and giving it back (with interest?) to the anonymous tax payer or visitor; to those whose contributions - like that of the blood donor - go unacknowledged and unreciprocated because their contributions are not the calculated bequeathing or sponsorship of the wealthy and famous, but the invisible support of a truly disinterested generosity.

### An Economy of Love



*In the Reading Point on Level 5 West at Tate Modern and in the Bank of England Museum, at unspecified times during the day a visitor might be approached by a gallery or museum official. 'This is for you' will accompany the presentation of a beautifully wrapped limited- edition print.*

With such a simple gesture, habituated museum visits (the cool aesthetic exchange between an audience and an artwork or exhibition) were transformed into emotional exchange between the visitor and the institution. Curators, administrators, maintenance people, sales staff and others who nominated themselves to give away the gift found themselves trying to explain what they were doing, or what they thought was happening. The chosen visitors wonders 'Why me?' or those not chosen but watching the giving, wonder 'Why not me?' The work of the work of art resides in these encounters, this moment of critical reflection, where the visitor and the representative of the institution negotiate the nature of the exchange; the very nature of the 'work' of the work of art.

The intention with the issue of the gift in *Capital*, and by extension to all those individuals that enter into its orbit - through rumour, publicity, the project, or even this text - was to initiate an engagement with some sense of the social imagination, and to set in motion a series of future encounters or economies. Each beautiful print-gift might trigger unpaid debts or cancel others, or perhaps encourage acts of generosity or love; and these obligations have no reciprocal object other than the economy, over which the institution through which they received the gift, preside. Is this the root of a 'public good', the commons, the welfare state, and culture itself?

Through the issue of the gift in *Capital*, the artwork becomes nothing other than a temporary point of punctuation, relevant for those that encounter it in shifting fields of value, attention and exchange. Such artworks are not points of origin or termination but nodes in networks of exchange. As huge areas of social life are spiraling into abstraction - largely as a result of the complexity of our globally

networked economies - the most basic functions of our daily life, the simplest purchase involves lines of debt and credit, chains of labour relationships and complex supply routes; of materials, capital, images, aspiration and information which circle the globe. If art has traditionally been able to make visible, and give form to the most subtle yet powerful of beliefs, it is understandable therefore that the most ambitious contemporary art would seek to engage with these immaterial forces.

In networked economies the exchange of accumulated value as capital, whether cultural or financial, has become slippery and complex. It is no longer clear where the creation of value, the foundation of political economy, fits into our accelerated exchange of signs, services and information. Potentials manufactured in cultural, entertainment and creative industries like Museums and Galleries merge into Public Relations, Development and Sponsorship and produce profits; profits of all kinds for Advertising, Retail, Branding and Consultancies. These economies emerge, function and then dissipate, only to be reformulated elsewhere in a slightly different format like a credit-rating. But what is clear is that art is no longer a luxury by-product of financial capital, but central to these 'new' economies; it is the place where the symbolic economy interfaces and has the potential to interrupt the frictionless running of the merely financial.

So, the financial expert can no longer ignore the force of 'aesthetic' or 'cultural' experience, and likewise, the artist cannot be ignorant of the forces of capital, as they increasingly merge with, dissolve and influence the very terrain on which artists are encouraged to work. This is not merely to acknowledge that art is bought and sold, or that artists should be conscious of a 'market', but to recognise that exchange is a powerful aesthetic object in and of itself. Recently, there has been a popular eruption of the symbolic power of the gift, characterised by the struggle surrounding Open Source software and the astonishing growth of peer-to-peer file sharing networks of exchange. Commons based peer production, where everyone contributes to a collective good, has reanimated a gift-based economy to produce global systems and services.<sup>13</sup> Clearly capital, as an index

of creativity, is peerless. The formal structures that frame different economies, their institutions, rules, restrictions and subsidies give form to exchange, and through Marx's famous extrapolation, the social and creative relations they facilitate.

To contest these forces we have to learn to have an interest in disinterestedness, and invest in a generosity that is not calculated. The gift has the potential to contest the economising of culture, the reduction of all exchange to financial calculation. Through giving and generosity, economic domination is transformed into mutual dependence, kindness, devotion and love.

3

**NOTES:**

1. See the US debt clock at <[http://www.brillig.com/debt\\_clock/](http://www.brillig.com/debt_clock/)>. 'The United States needs foreign investment of around \$505.6 billion dollars a year to service this debt. Without this investment, the US and eventually the world economy would slowly grind to a halt.' Briefing paper, World Financial Markets, J.P. Morgan, 10 December 2002.
2. Britain's National Debt was £12 million in 1700 and is currently estimated at £470 billion.
3. The philosopher Michel Foucault suggests that money is '[a] privileged instrument within the domain of representation' (1974: 195).
4. According to political economist Sir William Petty (1862), quoted in *From A National to a Central Bank*, Bank of England Publication, undated.
5. Britain removed itself from the Gold Standard in 1931. The Gold Standard was a monetary system between trading nations in which the *unit of account* was a fixed weight of gold. Typically under a gold standard, paper money circulates as a medium of exchange but the issuer makes it convertible into gold on demand.
6. The Bretton Woods system of international economic management established the rules for commercial and financial relations among the major industrial states in July 1944. The agreement anchored national currencies to the dollar, linked the value of the dollar to the price of gold and in many respects it replaced the Gold Standard. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bretton\\_Woods\\_Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bretton_Woods_Conference)>. Britain's principal representative at the Bretton Woods conference was the brilliant economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes went on to found and become the first chairman of the Arts Council of Britain in July 1945.
7. Personal debt in Britain has broken through the £1 trillion (£1,000,000,000,000) barrier and is increasing by £1 million every four minutes; the interest we pay on this debt is running at £6 billion every month <<http://www.creditaction.org.uk/debtstats.htm>>.
8. We have little interest in the financial value of art-objects. It is obvious that everything can evolve a price and grow a market; even cans of shit.
9. See our previous project *Free Trade* at the Manchester Art Gallery (2003), archived at <<http://www.chanceprojects.com/>>.
10. Was this a guilt-debt of a wealthy capitalist being repaid? What network of obligation was Sir Henry Tate canceling, or setting in motion?
11. See Bourdieu's essay, 'Marginalia - Some Additional Notes on the Gift' (1997: 231).
12. See particularly chapter 5 of Wu's *Privatising Culture* (2002: 122).
13. The Symbolic Exchange advocated by Baudrillard cannot be better exemplified than by Apache web server software which is currently running 67% of the world wide web, the open-content collaborative encyclopedia <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)>, or the fastest growing operating System – Linux. See <<http://www.serverwatch.com/>>.

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## GLOBALICA: COMMUNISM, CULTURE AND THE COMMODITY

Esther Leslie



*Michael Jackson in East Berlin*

### **Property and expression**

Our starting point is a well-known position voiced by Walter Benjamin in the epilogue to his essay 'The Artwork in the Age of its Technical Reproduction':

'The growing proletarianization of modern people and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property.'<sup>1</sup>

The passage suggests that representation is subject to substitution. The two meanings of representation are relevant - representation as *image* of the surface and representation as *political enfranchisement*. Fascism produces an image of the masses: they come to expression - 'zu ihren Ausdruck'. This phrase has particular resonance in the context of film, which is the type of representation

that Benjamin refers to in this essay. An image of the masses - their chemical trace - is pressed into celluloid. They see themselves. There is a circuit of reflection between the cinema masses and the masses on film. These masses are re-iterated. They have been compacted into a *Volk*, a dense mass body on display, mute in any meaningful sense. Fascist monumental culture is moulded for the masses and out of the masses. News report films and photographs in magazines reproduce the complex patternings, emphasising the vast size of the spectacular shows, the Nazi rallies and sportive-military displays. The dictatorial camera eye surveys the surface areas of the productions, cruising above and across the dramaturgy and tightly controlled choreography of the event. The camera eye transmits aerial views of specific regimented shapes made out of 'human material' (Benjamin 1992: 235).<sup>2</sup> These shaped, ornamentalised masses are bearers of a structure that they do not compose but into whose order they are made to slot by an authoritarian order external to them, and which has technology on its side.<sup>3</sup> This is visual representation without political representation. To be truly representative, in a political sense, would not, according to Benjamin, involve voting. This is a bourgeois model of representation. Representation would rather presuppose the abolition of property relations. The relations Benjamin describes are none other than capitalist. And he expresses in this thesis the idea that fascism was in 1933 the response to a crisis of capitalism, specifically a crisis that relates to class struggle, in that the masses have been exercising a right to alter property relations. They have made demands, acted as revolutionaries and threatened existing relations of ownership. That is to say they have genuinely represented themselves in expressing their right to change iniquitous property relations, which comprise democratic disposal over the means of production. Note that Benjamin terms this expropriation a *right* that the masses possess and demand. This explodes the bourgeois language of rights, which find its pinnacle in the right to own property.

Benjamin is describing a phase of capitalism that manifested as fascism, and as reference to capitalism his thoughts are not historically superseded. After all, no shift in property relations has occurred. In terms of labour all classes have been

placed in the position of the proletariat. Their labour conditions ('flexible' and long hours, generalised freelancing, performance-related pay, the increase in bureaucracy and surveillance) are evidence of this. Living standards and quality of life for the world's vast majority are lower now than they were before the ideological and economic victory of the market. The enormous development of the productive forces has brought with it few social advances, even if technology and science have developed apace, though constrained by the logic of the market. Robert Kurz has demonstrated statistically that workers in the Middle Ages were better off than workers of the past quarter-millennium. The working day was shorter for 15<sup>th</sup> century workers and more food could be bought for the money earned (Kurz 1999). Extension and intensification of labour time, which increases relative poverty, and subjection to the market at every turn is our reality, including the privatisation of public services, which devolves down to the level of the mortgaged individual.

Private property is the mainstay of capitalism. Before it was hijacked by Soviet state 'socialism', communism meant the 'positive supersession of private property as self-estrangement, and hence the true *appropriation* of the *human* essence through and for man' (Marx 1975: 348). In capitalism, property ownership (which was, and in many ways still is, the bourgeois pre-requisite for political representation) cannot be thought separately from the division of labour. Division of labour and private property are identical, notes Marx in the *German Ideology* and elsewhere. Division of labour is activity, while private property is the product of that activity, which is alienated from the producer through the process of commodification or expropriation. The division of labour is the parcelling up of the productive process into smaller processes, but it is also characterised in the split between manual and mental labour. This split marks itself across labour, including the specialised form of labour that is artistic production. The 'primary alienation', the split in species being occasioned by the division of labour, accompanies the unequal division of cultural access and benefit. Art marks the site of a wounding. The common perception of art reinforces this split. Art's existence as product of manual labour, a process of production, is

overlooked. It is seen rather as an intellectual or divinely inspired manifestation, which has a physical form, that comes to life only through the artist's inspiration and which is convenient for the process of it becoming property. Art is produced to be a commodity, like any other, though it is also a strange one. Its power resides in its actual re-combination of mental and manual labour. That is art's actual critical moment. Its simultaneously sensuous and intellectual existence is never simply use value or exchange value, but an effort at universal human values or a reminder of their absence. Cultural form is slashed by, negatively formed by or located in relation to social division. That art exists as a specialised area means that it can only be an alibi for the guilty portion of non-cultural life. It is an unfreedom for a few people to be charged with the task of being an artist, bearing that social role, while others are excluded from it. Conversely, marred by commodification, artistic practice today is a deformation of the sensuous unfolding of the self in solidarity that indicates real human community. Marred as such, it succumbs increasingly to the commodity. The taste of advertising man and collector Charles Saatchi, only made stark the link between his trade and the 'sensationalist glamour laced with wit' aesthetic of all that came after Young British Art, or YBA.

### Art and advertising



*Berlin beer advert at the time of Christo's Reichstag wrapping*

As much as art is a commodity, the commodity apes art, and takes over its representational task. Given the refined techniques of late capitalism, an even smaller part of the commodity syntax - the brand or commodity name - is suitable for this. The name represents us, articulates for us. It thinks for us, where we are mute. In his 1938 essay 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' Adorno observed a precursor of a more recent trend, writing:

'For a while an English brewery used for propaganda purposes a billboard that bore a deceptive likeness to one of the whitewashed brick walls which are so numerous in the slums of London and the industrial cities of the North. Properly placed, the billboard was barely distinguishable from a real wall. On it, chalk-white, was a careful imitation of awkward writing. The words said: "What we want is Watney's".' (1992: 42)

The brand of beer is presented as a political preference, the ad-line a type of slogan, parodying political demands from below. The masses are meant to make a commodity recommended to them the object of their own desires and actions. Compulsion is at work. Compulsion operates bodily too. Capitalist cultural forms infiltrate themselves into the body when its victims are compelled to whistle pop tunes, when movements imitate the movements on the screen, when street language limps behind media formulations. Language presses in from the outside, transporting with it domination in the form of a commodity already masked as a desire.



*An instant coffee jar foil*

In the capitalist system, language corruption is well-advanced. The commodity has infiltrated our most intimate moments. It speaks to us like a friend, lover, employer, teacher, nurse - or simply as our inner voice.



*'I can't believe it's not butter' brand of margarine*

The branders of products take it upon themselves to pre-determine our experience by naming things - in ways that leave no room for a spontaneous relation to the object. It is as if the products, these little fetishes, speak to us, or rather for us; the shelves are full of whispers, the billboards vociferous. The brands try to pre-empt our senses - putting words into our mouths, until words like 'delicious' are applied to the patently non-delicious, and 'speciality' to the ordinary - these become trademark properties of poor quality mass foodstuffs.



*'Deliciously flavoured rice'*

Or they try to join up the dots of our experience by reflection across its domains.



*Themed spaghetti tins*

And every available space is devoted to this invasion of subjectivity by objectivity.



*Beer advert on Camden High Street, London*

The rich aroma is moments away, uttered Nescafe coffee, just as your thumb was poised to burst the gold foil.

*The rich aroma is moments away...  
instant coffee foil*



Continuing their one-way conversation, a few months later it changed to: 'Prepare for an even richer aroma'.



*Prepare for an even richer aroma...*

Words get occupied until shaken of meaning, and turned banal. When Coca Cola entered the Chinese market back in the 1920s, it initiated a process in branding which was perhaps anticipatory. The characters for the name were apparently chosen in order to prescribe the experience to be had, and so Mandarin Chinese spelt out 'to permit mouth to be able to rejoice' - or 'something palatable from which one derives pleasure'.<sup>4</sup> The contemporary echo of this is the occupation of a word like cool or bliss or sublime until it is shaken of meaning, and turns banal.

*'Bliss' and 'Sublime' sauces*





'Cool' crisps

### Global fortunes: cultural commodification

In the 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer still spoke of 'two worlds.' A vignette in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* called "Two Worlds" begins:

'Here in America there is no difference between a man and his economic fate. A man is made by his assets, income, position, and prospects. The economic mask coincides completely with a man's inner character. Everyone is worth what he earns and earns what he is worth. He learns what he is through the vicissitudes of his economic existence. He knows nothing else.' (1997: 211)

Undoubtedly, the shock for the German exiles was that, in the US, money was not a private affair. Money was not a subject to be avoided in polite company, but, on the contrary, it was a measure of self-worth to be publicly brandished. But the Europeans' repulsion at this brash materialism was not simply a result of their gentlemanly politesse, and their horror at what should remain secret and yet be enjoyed privately. It was an inkling that commodification of the self, and the invasion of commodity relations into all areas of life, was an advancing, intensifying process and that the new Empire led the way where others would follow. In Adorno and Horkheimer's statement that 'everyone is worth what he earns and earns what he is worth' - there is irony, or inhabitation of the speech patterns of the enemy, for surely Adorno and Horkheimer, students of Marxism, know that within capitalism precisely the wage recipient does not earn what he is worth in any genuine sense. The measure is a skewed one - 'worth' or value arises only via a complex set of mechanisms and mediations. Contrary to the appearance of transparency, the reality of value is not so immediately apparent. Adorno and Horkheimer describe a purely economic existence that becomes ideology. Adorno and Horkheimer write of the US male: 'They judge themselves

by their own market value and learn what they are from what happens to them in the capitalistic economy.' (1997: 211) Newly trapped inside that capitalist economy is also culture. *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* chapter on the 'culture industry' squeals out a protest against the entertainments that emerge from standardisation and capitalist - be that free world or state-directed - methods of production, both dictatorships by the market, whether or not mediated through bureaucratic administration. Adorno and Horkheimer observe plenty of opportunities for the culture industry to broadcast cultural propaganda, dreams, tales of success and the 'it could be you' of lottery tickets, all re-asserting an ideology of luck and chance, which is the system's get-out clause, circumventing the slogan about everyone getting the price that's right. For the lucky few, there is always a *chance* - or hope - of being one of the fortunate few who shoots out of the crowd into easy money or fame. If they 'fail' in life, say Adorno and Horkheimer, then it was simply their fault or fate. Positivistic and anti-idealist the American way may be, but it cannot do away with the ancient concept of destiny. However fate's motive force is not the gods but something emerging from the sorry masses themselves, their own efforts or lack of them. Adorno and Horkheimer write:

'Their fate, however sad it may be, is not something outside of them; they recognise its validity. A dying man in China might say, in a lowered voice:

Fortune did not smile on me in this world,  
Where am I going now? Up into the mountains  
To seek peace for my lonely heart.

I am a failure, the American says - and that is that.' (1997: 211)

'Two Worlds' proposes, then, two different modes of being in the world, linked to two types of fortune, luck or monetary, both covered by the English word fortune. Here cultural difference is registered. There is one world where the caprice of the gods organises and determines life's meaning, and one world where even the internal sense of self is measured in terms of hard cash equivalent.<sup>5</sup> And what is that internal self? It is something pre-articulated, the inside as pure externality indeed.

In identifying the monopolistic character of culture, and industry in general, and its compulsive invasion of mind-space and bodily gesture, Adorno and Horkheimer perceive a tendency which, despite recent sunny pronouncements about niche culture, cultural proliferation, audience empowerment and the world of choice, has continued unabated into our era. What Adorno and Horkheimer called 'the system which is uniform as a whole and in every part' still persists and, despite well broadcast assertions of diversity and choice, in this world too 'all the living units crystallise into well-organised complexes' (1997: 120).

Indeed the monopolistic tendency is even more pronounced nowadays, when, for example, in the United States media concentration is far greater than ever before, with a huge world market divided up between the 'big ten'<sup>6</sup> media conglomerates that have billion-dollar interests in publishing, television, film, video and radio, music, theme-parks, internet and sports. Concentrated ownership across these areas makes it so much easier to cross-promote products, i.e. to produce material in multiple formats, as in the Disney animation film that becomes video, theme-park attraction, book, in magazines, pop hit, toy and accessories, and McDonald's or Burger King 'freebie'. It all locks together tightly and forms an unavoidable bulk.

This is a world of exhausted internationalised formats, where repetition is compulsive, as *Pop Idol*, *Big Brother 2, 3 4* and *Celebrity Big Brother*, or *Celebrity Survivor*, or another so called Reality TV show and/or quiz show format replicates around the world. Boredom inhabits this process as a permanent threat, and so hopes are high for short memories as the next re-recycling comes round, and celebrities rise and fall, to give the illusion that something is really happening, when really everything in essence stays the same: the business as usual of the expropriation of surplus-value. The culture industry has perfected techniques of substitution in representation. Reality TV shows, like evolving species, mutating, combining, cross-pollinating on a global scale, dramatise non-lives, waiting for celebrity, and endlessly re-inforcing the banality of life and delighting in human tensions. There is a myth of uncovering talent, or

specialty in some, such as *Pop Idol*, but the shows work best when mediating failure, mediocrity or hatred. These shows parody representation, by paralleling all the mechanisms of democratic form - through voting - albeit it at very high telephone call costs, and occupying the public sphere, in newspaper discussion and free exchange amongst individuals on chat groups and elsewhere. The shows expose the very processes of how spectacular fame is manufactured, and so seem to have nothing to hide. This seemingly total exposure lays bare a realm of system-rational goals which are values, and the values are wealth and celebrity. These are utterly unchallengeable assets, which are 'democratic' simply because everyone is supposed to want them. They express the general will, which means that the property system is not only unaffected. It is vaunted. The more the gap is widened between them and you, the more arresting it is. The more arresting it is, the more its hidden structures of ownership are reinforced, the wider it spreads. Representation short-circuits, marking only the place of the commodity speaking for itself or through its audiences turned advocates.

The standardisation of culture is linked to industrial capitalist forms of manufacture, and so, as that form became everywhere the dominant form, in its trail followed a global standardisation of cultural forms. The dying peasant in China, or at least the peasant's cousin, the factory worker, is exposed eventually to the same images and sounds. The extension of the standardised domain brings with it the promise of pleasures that are rarely fulfilled but keep people hoping and holding on to the edge of the abyss, instead of struggling out of it. But there is a flip-side. From this tendency of the commodity form to universalise itself, a global working class is forged, with common reference points. Even in Adorno's day, such exposure to identical cultural experiences was developing. After all, it was in 1928 that Coca Cola entered the Chinese market, though, given its repulsion again when Sino-US relations were bad, it was not until September 2002 that Coca Cola could announce its 50% share of the Chinese beverage market, and rising. Worldwide, experience of labour and cultural experience standardise, shrinking that field of experience, but making the points of contact more extensive. A common language, of products and advertising,

of work processes and management-speak, of establishment political rhetoric world-wide, is shared - a universally understood language emerges. Languages, even individual words, can be made to say very different things, depending on the spin. Subversion too has the chance to be universally understood, and that means universally reiterated to potentially devastating effect. This is where art and politics conjoin. Or, better, cultural practice is recast. A certain type of ventriloquistic critical cultural practice emerges, in recognition of the overly loquacious commodity.

No longer is art met by an anti-art that was excited by the massifying and anti-hierarchical powers of labels, packaging, illustrated magazines, as seen in Dada and the work of Kurt Schwitters. Nor is a cool aestheticism of the new glossy object caught on the new glossy photographic paper appropriate, such as was promulgated in the 'new objectivist' photography of Weimar Germany in the mid-1920s. Perhaps this commercialised effusion has become too much a part of our environment to propose new modes of social relations beyond art, and the system of inequity that shores it up. Instead anti-culture is needed - a more specific type of subversion of the signs that exist. No longer is it enough to incorporate them into artistic statements, in the manner of Andy Warhol or Jeff Koons. Pop Art showed that Dada's commercial redeployments might simply, in the end, flatter the market. The imagery of commercial detritus has to be detonated, challenged on the level of the sign itself, as in today's anti-logos, anti-brandings and subvertisements. All these practices recognise both the spread of the power of the corporations, but can also exploit the widespread intelligibility of capitalist commercial signage. As much as the world-wide deployment of the commodity excites businessmen and advertisers who forge their grand-scale images, increasingly it is subversion of these common factors that excites art activists, and is carried out by sometimes high-tech, sometimes low-tech, local means. The wish is to speak globally to a global field of domination, in which populations are more normally expected to remain mute and adopt the role of consumer.

### Image salvage and a new barbarism

In the mid-1920s, Walter Benjamin considered the language of the streets, in his book *One Way Street*, a book that signalled his break with traditional modes of literary scholarship, with its subheadings retrieved from street signage and advertisements. Its programmatic opening clause asserted that the languages of mass communication provide the template for modern articulation. Benjamin proposed the urgent communication of the telegram, postcard, leaflet or the economically articulate photomontage. He writes:

'The construction of life is at present in the power of facts far more than of convictions, and of such facts as have scarcely ever become the basis of convictions. Under these circumstances true literary activity cannot aspire to take place within a literary framework - this is, rather, the habitual expression of its sterility. Significant literary work can only come into being in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that better fit its influence in active communities than does the pretentious universal gesture of the book - in leaflets, brochures, articles and placards. Only this prompt language shows itself actively equal to the moment.' (1979: 45)

Benjamin saw mass communications dialectically. Universally understood languages - words, forms, reference points - emerge. However, at the same time, there is a danger of control of meanings from above, of a degradation, of an emptying out of meaning as words and signs are hitched to selling commodities or selling newspapers or selling political lines and ideology, and all experience is filtered through exchange relations. Benjamin recognised an equally dialectical strategy to combat this, and quotation was at its core: if found materials are cited in critical contexts there is a chance of regaining expressibility in an age of degraded communication. The languages around us are the vehicles of communication, but they must be re-imbued with meanings *for us*.

In a letter to Gershom Scholem in August 1935, Benjamin set redemptive quoting at the heart of his method, a salvaging of scraps, the penetrant but trivial flotsam of our daily lives, and, in redeploying them, re-articulated them. He recorded his

'attempt to hold the image of history in the most unprepossessing fixations of being, so to speak, the scraps of being' (1978: 685). The process of 'globalisation' has produced its antithesis, a globalised resistance. This might be resistance to globalisation or, more specifically, resistance to world capitalism on a world scale. This global fightback established or occupied channels of information, discussion, distribution, commentary and critique. Here is another world of cultural activity, epitomised in anti-capitalist activism, and much of which is instinctively or consciously based on avant-gardist theories and practices (e.g. montage, détournement), processes that previously resonated most forcefully at moments of revolutionary upheaval, i.e. the 1920s and 1960s. This new wave of practice is manifested both digitally through various types of 'net-activism' and in old-school styles (e.g. 'Billboard Liberation', fly-posting, graffiti). It works specifically on representation in relation to property relations. Such practice might be fruitfully considered in relation to Benjamin's concept of the 'new barbarism'; here, like then, a kind of squatting of the enemy's methods, tools and modes of address. Benjamin argued that 'impoverished experience' can be overpowered only if the fact of poverty is made into the underpinning of a political strategy of a 'new barbarism' that corresponds faithfully to the new realities of the constellation of *Masse* and *Technik*. His examples included Brecht, Scheerbart, Adolf Loos, Cubists, Paul Klee and early Disney.

Such a strategy of redeeming the scraps and rubbish is connected to another of Benjamin's espousals - the promotion of a new and positive concept of barbarism, as presented in Benjamin's 1933 essay 'Experience and Poverty'.<sup>7</sup> 'A NEW BARBARISM' - this has become something of a catchphrase now, operative as category in bestsellers such as *The Coming Anarchy* by warmongering US journalist Robert Kaplan or the liberal moral critique in *The Empire and the New Barbarians* by Jean-Christophe Rufin from Doctors Without Borders. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri also speak of barbarism, though positively, in fact drawing on Walter Benjamin, in a section in *Empire* called 'New Barbarians' (2000). Benjamin is evoked as author of a strategy of 'new, positive notion of barbarism'. Quoting from Benjamin's vignette 'The Destructive Character', they

write of how the poverty of experience obliges the barbarian to begin anew, that the 'new barbarian "sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere"' (2000: 215).<sup>8</sup> For them, the 'new barbarians' ruin the old order through affirmative violence. Hardt and Negri argue, then, for the progressive nature of barbarism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. A migrant barbarian multitude: former 'productive cadres' who desert socialist discipline and bureaucracy in a bid for freedom (2000: 214). Its barbarism manifests in modes of life. Their bodies transform and mutate to create new posthuman bodies, fluid both in sexuality and gender ascription, cyborgish and simian, bodies that are 'completely incapable of submitting to command,' and 'incapable of adapting to family life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life' (2000: 216). There is a technological supplement to this. Hardt and Negri write: 'The contemporary form of exodus and the new barbarian life demand that tools become poetic prostheses, liberating us from the conditions of modern humanity.' (2000: 217) And these prostheses are, according to Hardt and Negri, those of the 'plastic and fluid terrain of the new communicative, biological, and mechanical technologies' (2000: 218).

But Hardt and Negri's Benjaminian barbarian is misconceived. This fluidity and self-modification misapprehends Benjamin's 'positive concept of barbarism', for this relates to art's producers and consumers and is strategic and negational - that is to say it operates in contradictory relation to the points of tension, rather than setting up a parallel utopian existence. Benjamin's positive concept of barbarism has less to do with an effortless prosthetic use of technologies to modify bodies, flowing in the direction of capital's own unfolding and post-human dreams of immortality. It has more to do with a scornful appropriation of technologies and the techniques they suggest for strategic purposes of representation. The attempt is to make the speaking commodity condemn itself, in its own language and via an over-exposure that represents all too well the punishing barbarism of our world. Not over-dramatically, but through form, texture, choice phrases and a suspicion of bombastic Realism, both in its socialist form and in today's New Capitalist Realism, with its glamour, mediation, pop reference, that has

accompanied the former so-called socialist parties' turn to what they call the New Realism.

'Impoverished experience' is overpowered only if the fact of poverty is made into the underpinning of a political strategy of a 'new barbarism' that corresponds faithfully to the new realities of the constellation of *Masse* and *Technik*, in all their potential combinations. In his day, Benjamin was buoyed up by a mass media worker - John Heartfield - who developed a critical method of working with refuse, especially technological detritus, and who turned the barbarism of capitalism back against itself. Heartfield's photomontages took the enemies' words and images, from the press, from speeches, advertising and so on, and used them as evidence against those enemies in humorous jokes, fastened explosively to the moment, in a skirmish over the meaning of words. For Heartfield there is no other place from which to view the world - no place of exodus out of contemporary exigencies, only a battle over a particular word in this world, a class struggle in the realm of signs.

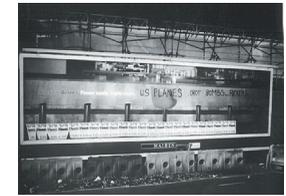
It makes little sense to speak of today's newly barbaric practices, which happen both locally on any street corner or globally via the world wide web, frequently anonymously, eschewing the personal mark of the creator, as either art, on the one hand, or politics, on the other. They are both. And they are also a response to the cheapening of technologies and new forms of reproduction and distribution, as well as a response to the world-wide marketing of signs, and, along with them, the values that they attempt to enforce globally. At their core is a challenge to property relations and the division of labour, for they overcome the notion of artist as profession. They make manifest the struggle to link representation to the right to alter property relations. The tendency of the commodity form is to universalise itself, presenting us then with shared experiences, shared languages, shared experience of class exploitation. In this context, today's impoverished experience is taken to task and re-animated - en masse and technically - by 'newly barbaric' strategies of occupation - and occupation means not relinquishing the ground. In that context the struggle over signs is a type of Esperanto, internationally

experienced and internationally understood. It has its moments of irony and subtlety - subvertisements, net activism spoofs, ironically positioned billboard liberation front activities - all of these anti-culture struggles against the clutter of commercial signs in the environment. The copyrighting and commodification of language as property is most ludicrously expressed in the propaganda of the Brand Names Education Foundation, whose stated mission is:

'to advance worldwide knowledge of the nature, purpose and value of brand names and the responsibilities associated with their use. The Foundation believes that trademarks and brand names enable consumers to make intelligent choices among competing products and services while encouraging accountability, quality and honest competition.'<sup>16</sup>

Our response is to find ways of mocking their commodity-bliss and commercial spray-on sublime, in order to produce our own self-determined versions and reveries. These may be subtle or direct.

*American Airlines advert - graffitied with 'US planes drop bombs... fuckers'. This is the second graffiting of the image. The first version which said 'US Planes drop bombs' was rapidly papered over. This is the retort.*



It is still incumbent to insist that representation is not a rendition of the self from the perspective of the commodity. But rather, in order to regain a genuine sense of representation, beyond the bourgeois sense, the right to change property relations must be the implicit demand. Anti-capitalist commodity mockery is one version, and is not immune to recuperation, as Adorno's Watney's advert already suggested, in its prefiguration of smart advertising. Anti-capitalist culture is one response to the global world of commodified signs. It is tactical and as such means-directed. Art, that combination of mental and manual labour, remains without tactics and not means-directed. There is something immanent to all art that mocks exploitation, immanently, in as much as art is always also not a commodity, but a special type of 'labour' that produces a special type of

product. Perhaps only communists, true communists (not Stalinists) still want to recognise this; communists, that is, who despise above all that which has been deformed into property. It is also only communists who reject the idea of art as immunised from the political, as in the 'New Aestheticism' or other culture-protectionist stances. It is only communists who refuse to ignore culture in favour of political engagement, as the too practically-oriented 'activist' Left still insist. Only communists who recoil from dissolving culture into the political, in the manner of Cultural Studies where culture is misconceived as politics by other means. Still, this version of Cultural Studies is now largely dead, as cultural policy and cultural populism took over. The shift away from the Althusser-influenced delineation of ideology, and ideological state apparatuses, whereby the state and its organs produce contexts for thought and thinking that serve class interests and the market is a force of control, an ideological justification of class oppression ceded ground to an embrace of culture, the ideological superstructure in all its forms as an authentic or post-authentic expression of subjectivity. Ideology was no longer a problematically inescapable effluent, but rather the very site of pleasure, resistance, power and counter-power, a place of negotiation. Culture was first registered as resistant, dissident and then empowering, until the point was reached when everyone forgot what was being resisted, and culture instead became a site of affirmation of (different) identities, with theories that fixated on the consumer, that is, on taste, the language of market research, of niche marketing, all capitalism's refined tools for product placement. In the positive affirmation of popular culture as a site of identity-formation, the one thing that cannot be mentioned is class, except for in terms of the category mistake of class as identity. But Marxism is not about endorsement of class identities, rather it is about their dissolution, transformation, sublation. Marxism is a theory of transformation, struggle, and class takes up its place here as a dynamic aspect of historical change, not a state of being to be reinforced.

It is the revolutionary communist, then, who in seeing this, faces culture as one part of a totality - held up as separate, because its separateness is part of that totality which needs art to seem autonomous. A communism that takes

culture seriously in refusing to dissolve it into a symptom of some other political reality, holding on to culture as culture, that is as something in certain ways autonomous; and yet, also, seeing culture as slashed by, negatively formed by or located in relation to social division, social determination, in relation to property and the division of labour. The insistence on negation - ironically mediated, uncompromising, the refusal to theorise away the contradictions and the pain - refuses turning difference into a badge of pride, and holds onto division as a split in the social totality. Communists of this stripe propose a type of disavowal of art: they still believe - while they disbelieve - in art.

♻

**NOTES:**

1. See Walter Benjamin [1936] 'The Artwork in the Age of its Technical Reproduction [Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit]', in German, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I, part 2, and G.S. vol. VII, part 1. In English variously, including *Illuminations* (1992) and the Belknap Press Selected Works.
2. Walter Benjamin [1936] 'The Artwork in the Age of its Technical Reproduction' in German, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I, part 2, p. 469/p. 507, and G.S. vol. VII, part 1, p. 383.
3. See Benjamin's discussion of the fascist art of propaganda in 'Pariser Brief I: André Gide und sein neuer Gegner' (1991 [1936]) *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. III, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, pp. 488-90.
4. See 'Transliteration of Coca-Cola Trademark to Chinese Characters', by H.F. Allman, formerly Legal Counsel in China for The Coca-Cola Company, cited at <[http://www.urbanlegends.com/products/coca-cola/coca-cola\\_chinese.html](http://www.urbanlegends.com/products/coca-cola/coca-cola_chinese.html)> and <<http://www.snopes.com/cokelore/tadpole.asp>>, as evidence of the truth of this story, despite rumours of falsity.
5. In Adorno and Horkheimer's America there was only conformity, a smoothly functioning capitalist whole, as uniform as the totalitarian Germany that they had left behind. Admittedly they overlooked certain tensions, the class struggles that pitted the glossy surface and which found a response - albeit a paranoid one - in the anti-Communist witch-hunts of the 1940s and 1950s. Adorno and Horkheimer were apparently unable to concede that even in an industry that epitomised for them the motor of ideological industrialised culture - Hollywood - there were fights, since the Wagner Act of 1935, upheld by the Supreme Court in April 1937, which encouraged employees to take seriously the right to organise and to protect themselves against unfair labour practices. Indeed, the 1940s saw a number of strikes in Hollywood, even at the core of the monstrous machinery of sadistic fun, at Disney's Burbank Studio. But maybe labour militancy was not enough for Adorno and Horkheimer. They were seeking something more fundamental than fair pay and class solidarity, something akin to a revolution of the whole way in which life is lived, and culture experienced.
6. See *The Nation's* report on the 'Big Ten' media conglomerates - searchable online.
7. See Walter Benjamin, 'Erfahrung und Armut' [1933], G.S. vol II, part 1, p. 214.
8. The quote continues: 'Where others encounter walls or mountains, there, too, he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. ... Because he sees ways everywhere, he always positions himself at crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble, not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.'
9. Cited from BNEF website.

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## RE-CODE.COM

### Carbon Defense League & Conglomco Media Conglomeration

- + *Re-code.com* was a free web service that allowed its customers to share product information and create barcodes that could be printed and used to re-code items in stores by placing new labels over existing UPC symbols to set a new price - participating in an act of 'tactical shopping'. *Re-code.com* at its core was a shared database, updateable by our customers. Participation was free and required no special membership agreements or software download. After entering the web site, customers could choose to search and view information in the database currently or add their own collected data to the system. Using the custom barcode generator application, barcodes were drawn in real time and made available to the user. We utilised only UPC-A type barcodes, one of the most common varieties of barcode. It is used in most retail applications in North America and Europe. On the web site, we showed users a process whereby they could obtain cheaper prices for items in stores by simply re-coding items they planned to purchase, or switch the labels on items to reveal messages for customers and cashiers that might reveal the 'true' prices of goods. The *Re-code.com* web site itself was a mockery of *Priceline.com*, made to look nearly identical to its counterpart who uses a consumer as revolutionary advertising approach to entice people to name their own price for goods and services. *Re-code.com* simply wanted to take that concept to its logical completion, allowing any price to be named and re-coded in the store by the customer through barcode replacement. *Re-code.com* highly encouraged re-coding name brand items with their generic equivalents as both a safety tactic and a way to comment on the overpricing of branded items. The two



New to re-code? [Click here](#)  
Want to help collect data? [Click here](#)  
Want to help advertise? [Click here](#)



Go to our video page for more.

HOW TO PRESHOP

**Search**  
Find the prices you want to pay using our Re-Code search utility. Find items that are sold where you shop.

**Print**  
Copy, Paste, and Print your results at home on label paper through your favorite graphics program.

HOW TO SHOP

**Find a store**  
Find a store that carries the item you have barcodes for. Try replacing brand name items with generics.

**Compare**  
Here we compare a generic item that costs \$1.00 less to a brand name item.

**Find the code**  
Locate the barcode and be aware of size and orientation.

**Peel**  
Peel off the preprinted sticker for the cheaper item, or cut out at home.

**Re-Code**  
Apply the cheaper item's barcode to the more expensive item.

**Check out**  
Cashiers usually don't notice but machines never do.

**Enjoy**  
Shopping is much more enjoyable when you determine the prices.

HOW TO POSTSHOP

**Add to us**  
Use our add form to submit information about unaltered items you purchase.

RE-CODE Your Own Price™

There are 612 barcodes in the database currently.

Search the RE-CODE.COM Supercomputer!

Search Term:   
MaxPrice:   
**SEARCH >** **SHOW ALL >**

Add to the RE-CODE.COM Supercomputer!

Category:   
Product Name:   
Product Brand:   
Store Name:   
Store Address:   
Store City:   
Store State:   
Packaging:   
UPC ID:   
Price:   
**ADD >**



Try Re-Code.com's BARCODE GENERATOR!

By inputting a 10, 11, or 12 digit UPC Type A number, you can instantly generate a barcode that can be printed and used for re-coding products with prices that you want to pay!

Enter 10, 11, or 12 digits  
  
**GENERATE**

Pressing Generate will take you to a new screen with the .png barcode image displayed. Right Click PC or CTRL+Click on a Mac over image and choose Copy then Paste into your favorite graphics program.

[Learn How a UPC Type A Retail Barcode Works](#)  
Support for multiple UPC Types coming soon!

Print Pre-formatted Re-Code.com Sheets

Try printing some of our most popular barcodes by store from these convenient PDF sheets:

- Price Chopper - NY - Updated March 14, 2003
- Wal Mart - NY - Updated March 14, 2003
- Shaws Food and Drug - ME - Updated March 14, 2003

Help Create Pre-formatted Sheets for Re-Code.com

Have an idea for a themed sheet? Send us [mail](#) about it or create it and [mail](#) it to us. Automated process to come soon.

\* We in no way endorse the theft of products or services. Re-code.com was created as satire. We intend only to make aware the prevalence of barcodes and begin a critical discussion about what their pervasiveness means. This is not a product designed to be used in any malicious or illegal manner. Any such use is strictly prohibited. You should not use any of the barcodes available from this site for any illegal activity. They are here for your amusement.

unique processes we developed that are critical to the building of the database are known as 'preshopping' and 'postshopping'. The processes required visiting *Re-code.com* both before and after the process of shopping.



re-code.com

- UPC ID
- Name
- Product Packaging
- Price

re-code.com

- Preshopping
- Re-coding

re-code.com

- Preshopping
- Re-coding
- Checkout

After going live on March 12th, 2003, the *Re-code.com* web site went unnoticed for close to 10 days when suddenly it began receiving attention on numerous weblogs<sup>1</sup> that understood the satire and appreciated the concept of the site. The project was presented on March 23 at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Chicago, IL. This move behind the white walls made *Re-code.com* become Art. *Salon.com* published the first story on the web site on April 10th. That same day, the domain name WHOIS masking service employed by *Re-code.com*, Domains by Proxy, received a cease and desist letter from attorneys representing the world's largest retail employer, Wal-Mart. Domains by Proxy hid the registration information for the domain name from public view for a price. At that time *Re-code.com* was averaging over 50,000 non-unique hits per day with a highpoint of 96,000 hits in one hour alone. The servers running the site were bogged down and access became sporadic at best. The site had struck a nerve and the attention that was now being given to the site's creators was now much more a result of Wal-Mart's threats than of the site's actual content. Countless interviews were granted with multiple media outlets including morning call in shows, college radio programmes, investigative reporters, National Public Radio stations, the British Broadcasting Company, and others around the world. The site's attention was almost too much to believe. Not only was Wal-Mart upset by the site, but also angered were Price Chopper (a chain grocery store whose self-scanning check out aisles were featured), the Kellogg's corporation (whose *Frosted Flakes*



cereal product was re-coded in the instructional video), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Federal Trade Commission. After consulting with several lawyers who had offered the site's creators pro-bono legal counsel, the database and barcode generator portions of the website were pulled down and replaced by a 10 minute response video by the site's creators detailing the events and presenting an argument retaliating against Wal-Mart.

The criminalisation of such a project by Wal-Mart, the world's largest retail corporation that serves to underline the double standard, critical deviant micro-networks and individuals must observe. Wal-Mart is a corporation that has shut down efforts of employees to organise labour unions and works hard to hire primarily part-time employees to avoid the cost of health insurance in the US. They are only one example of a normalised corporate strategy which in the name of capitalism serves only to punish individuals and protect boards of directors.

According to the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, the deregulation of energy and the hidden handshakes between government and corporation is responsible now for the accumulated theft of over \$71 billion from the California taxpayer.<sup>2</sup> If we take this as only one instance of corporate theft and compare it to the estimated 9 - 12 billion dollars in consumer theft estimated yearly, we see that there is much work to be done to liberate capital, when the corporate criminals go unpunished and shoplifters face harsh prison sentencing.

With such gross injustice on the part of these large corporations, consumer theft, as a process that works to radically liberate stolen capital, has much more work ahead of it. While consumer theft is still below the yearly estimated averages of corporate theft, it is working hard to bring justice where courts have failed. It should also be noted that the risks associated with consumer theft are usually much greater than those associated with corporate theft. This means that an 18 year old girl stealing a set of AA Batteries from Wal-Mart faces most likely a longer prison sentence than a board of directors member of Enron Corporation, responsible for billions of dollars in theft and the loss of countless pension

plans for its retiring employees. It's a tough job liberating capital, but due to uncontrollable circumstances our heroes are out there in the aisles everyday. These shoplifters are engaged in a micro-network of critical deviant practice.

These statistics were compiled by Hayes International, a theft consultancy firm. These numbers might look staggering, but some simple math by means of subtraction from the numbers we see below, shows that shoplifter liberators still have a lot of work ahead of them. Total retail losses are approximately \$33.21 billion annually, with 30%-40% of those losses coming from shoplifting.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1: Theft Incidents and Dollars lost to Shoplifters <sup>4</sup>

Time Frame	Dollars	Incidents
Annually	\$10 - \$13 Billion (\$9,963 - \$13,284 Billion)	330 - 440 Million (332.1 - 442.8 million)
Daily (365 days)	\$27 - \$36 Million (\$27,295,890 - \$36,394,521)	900,000 - 1,200,000 (909,863 - 1,213,151)
Hours (24)	\$1.1 - \$1.5 Million (\$1,137,329 - \$1,516,438)	38,000 - 50,500 (37,911 - 50,548)
Minutes (60)	\$19,000 - \$25,300 (\$18,955 - \$25,274)	630 - 840 (631.85 - 842.47)

From this position of limited power, the critical deviant is afforded the ability to radically engage the administrators of the status quo, which in the capitalist US are the corporations. Direct theft is one such effort. Simply the idea of theft, which is what essentially *Re-code.com* became about, scares the mega-corporations straight into defensive attack mode. Corporations like Wal-Mart issue countless cease & desist letters to protect the system they have constructed, that benefits only corporate deviance but harshly punishes the critical deviant practitioner. If only we had our own lobbying group then perhaps we might stake claim to having some role in governance. For now in the US we exist primarily as sacrificial lambs to shove fear into the hearts of all those that might consider deviant anti-capitalist activity. This is of course not to say that all critical deviant practice must work to overthrow a capitalist regime in the US. Such an argument would be contrary to the essential principle of critical deviant practice that is



occurring forever in a cycle of dissent. To clearly define an ideology as rigid as anti-capitalist (take that to mean whatever you like) as an essential part of critical deviant practice, limits the power of its flexibility. It will dominate eventually because it is fertile ground for continued and contradictory dissent, unlike capitalism.

*Re-code.com* began to address issues of humour as well as property and theft. The project worked very much in the tradition of the trickster mythology. Hyde warns 'beware the social system that cannot laugh at itself, that responds to those who do not know their place by building a string of prisons' (Hyde 1998: 72). In discussing property and theft Hyde states: 'Our ideas about property and theft depend on a set of assumptions about how the world is divided up. Trickster's lies and thefts challenge those premises and

in so doing reveal their artifice and suggest alternatives.’ (1998: 72)

This reinforces the notion that law is defined by the powerful by way of alleged democracy, or more appropriately, a supposed rule by the majority. The laws serve to uphold a notion of property which at its core is also subjective. By questioning a law or boundary as *Re-code.com* did, hidden and unfocused deeper questions emerge. Hyde asks ‘who gave all of Pennsylvania to William Penn’ (1998: 72)? It is the root of the question we ask where we find the essential questions. To accept that *Re-code.com* promoted theft requires first to accept that property ownership is not theft.

5

*Text excerpted from forthcoming publication by Carbon Defense League.*

#### NOTES:

1. A weblog is usually a personal website with periodic updates and journalistic style entries.
2. <<http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/utilities/rp/rp002193.pdf>>.
3. Both University of Florida and Hayes International surveys.
4. Hayes International survey.

*Re-code.com* is a collaboration between Carbon Defense League <<http://www.carbondefense.org>> and Conglomco Media Conglomeration <<http://www.conglomco.org>>. The web site <<http://www.re-code.com>> is currently offline after a second legal threat from Wal-Mart attorneys in Winter 2004.

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## TRIP THE LOOP, MAKE YOUR SWITCH, CONSUME THE NET

Julian Priest & James Stevens

### + **Trip the loop**

Our independent activity to directly connect individuals and share data, using wires and radio rather than use the incumbent provider, is a short circuit of the local telco loop, otherwise governed by corporate profit driven interests. This challenge throws into question all relationships in the sector by exposing access exploitation and asserting obscured rights.

### **Make your switch**

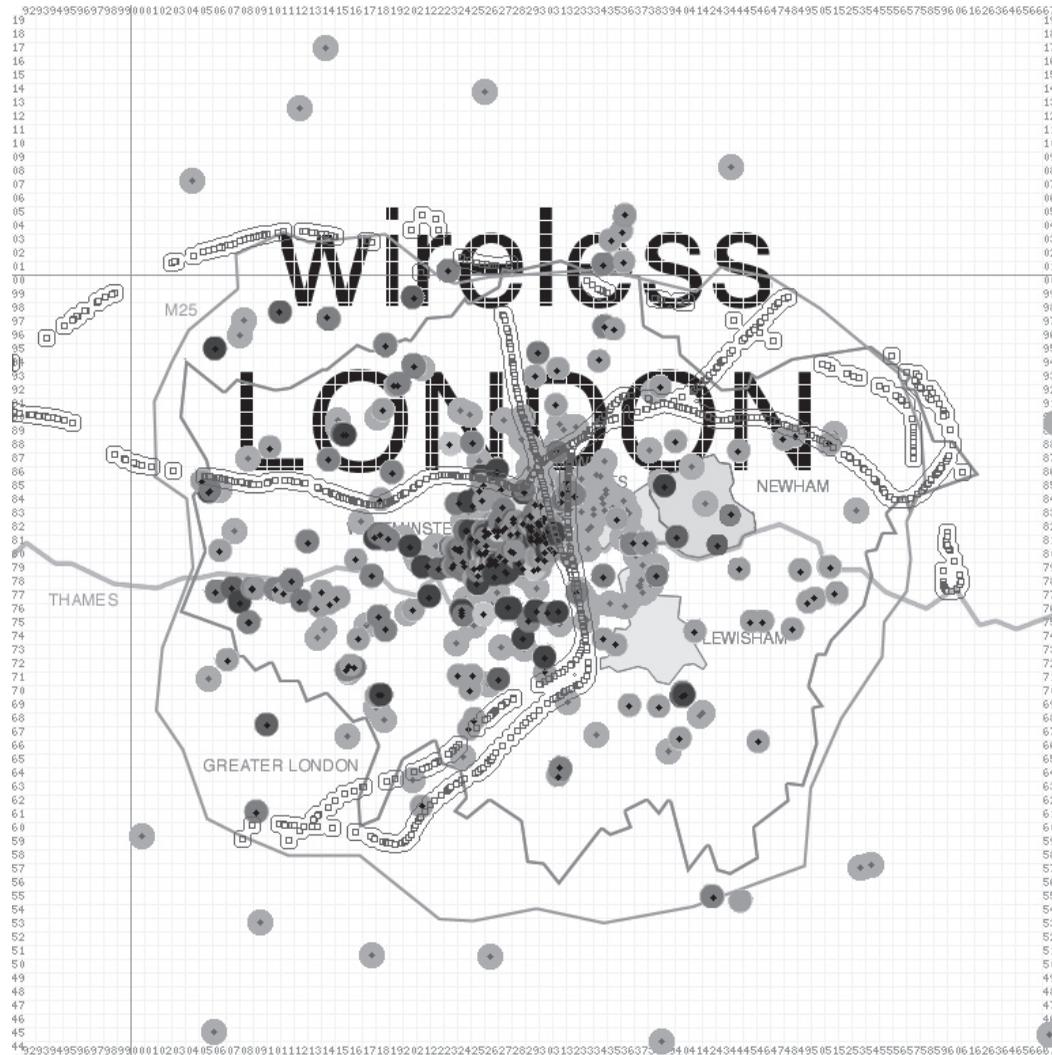
Our earliest efforts included the building of free software-driven routers to arbitrate exchange routes and articulate viable network peers to each other. We now use home grown mesh network software and inexpensive customisable hardware to fuel our equipment requirements and feed free network propagation. We are increasingly making a switch away from prescriptive definition of telecom utility to one that is owned and operated by its users.

### **Consume the net**

We engage with network neighbours in a logically minded and naturalistic approach to exchange data, without billing or censorship overheads. The community proposition is a compelling prospect and each instance of its adoption furthers the collective utility. It is an optimisation of resources.

### The State of Wireless London [extract]

The full report by Julian Priest is available from <[http://informal.org.uk/people/julian/publications/the\\_state\\_of\\_wireless\\_london/](http://informal.org.uk/people/julian/publications/the_state_of_wireless_london/)>.  
 First written in March 2004 (with financial support from the Arts Council of England and Space), [the] study looks at how wireless networking (WLAN) in London has developed over the last three years from hacktivist pastime to mainstream pursuit. [...]



Following the dot.com boom, a period of distorted values and valuations where everything touched by the internet lost its connection to geographic and economic realities, there came the crash in 2000. Independent and ground-up approaches to new technologies emerged in its wake, and wireless networking was one of these. Wireless free networking came as an antidote to the commercial pipe dreams of telcos and investors, and with its focus on the ownership of infrastructure and local and co-operative action, it can be seen as a grounding of internet utopianism in something real, useful and manageable. [...]

'Wireless' is a versatile term that conjures up images of war time huddles around Bakelite sets and describes a huge range of electromagnetic emissions including long wave, shortwave, visible light and radar. This study does not look at the entirety of wireless activity but focuses only on a certain radio frequency and a group of technologies that has been an enabler for free networking - the self-provision of computer networks. This frequency is 2.4Ghz. It is one of the few frequencies available in the UK for use by citizens which does not require a licence from the national regulatory authority. This arrangement is termed licence exemption, and 2.4 Ghz is peculiar in that it is license exempt in many jurisdictions around the world. This exemption is the result of the status of 2.4 Ghz as part of a guard band around the frequencies used by microwave ovens, which was considered by regulators to be a trash band, unusable on noise grounds. It was therefore opened up for public use, though within strict power limits. In contrast to other bands, this exemption meant that there was no licensing restriction or cost of usage, and technology vendors focused on the band as a place to develop products justifying a large R&D spend with a potentially huge market opportunity. Even though the band had been declared an unusable trash band, the low opportunity cost and international market for products drove technological innovation to overcome these difficulties.

Product development was also enabled by open standards, in particular the 802.11 group of standards (b, a, g) developed by the IEEE.<sup>1</sup> Just as the 802.3 standards that define wired Ethernet ensure that any compliant network device

connected to an Ethernet network will work correctly, the 802.11 standards strictly define wireless LAN. The existence of the standards allows for vendor-neutral interoperability, in effect creating the space for a WLAN market to develop. In 2000 these factors came together with the release of 802.11b products operating in the 2.4 Ghz band. They were high speed, compared to other wireless networking technologies operating at up to 11 Mbps, and above all cheap. The products were rapidly taken up by people wishing to self-provide their own networks and prices have continued to fall and speeds to rise, as WLAN equipment becomes a cheap commodity and the technology improves. [...] This means that the regulator does not keep statistics on coverage or usage in 2.4 Ghz and it has been up to user groups and other interested parties to construct their own databases of installations and maps of uptake as needed. Examples of these were created early on by Wireless Free networkers, later to be followed by commercial providers. [...]

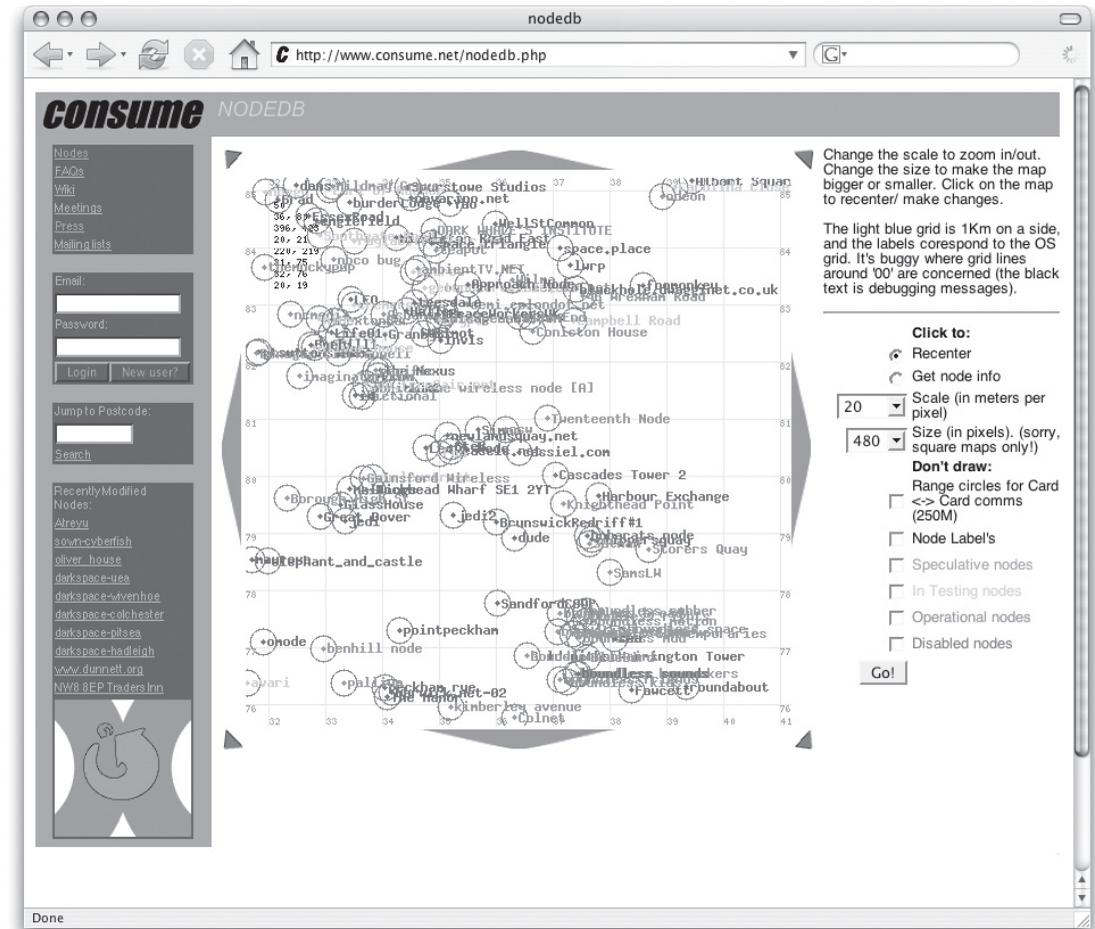
A Free Network is one which is owned and operated by its users, and allows for the free (libre) transit of data across it. By connecting many smaller free networks a larger network can be constructed and the sum of these is often termed The Freenetwork. Wireless networking makes this patchwork of networks possible in an urban environment like London by removing the need for running wires over different properties. Wireless freenetworking as an idea has strong roots in London. The Consume project was one of the first to propose using the 802.11b equipment that had been originally been designed for home and office internal networking, for building local user owned infrastructure. The project came out of three years of practical experience that started in 1997 with a link between two buildings on either side of Clink Street. The link between Backspace and Mediumrare provided access to an expensive internet leased line using earlier 802.11 equipment.<sup>2</sup> While an expensive solution at the time, it enabled the creation of a local network serving over 100 people. The wireless equipment had been chosen over a cable run in order to avoid a planning law that meant that only Public Telecoms Operators could string a wire across a street.

In 2000 James Stevens and I wrote a manifesto<sup>3</sup> and publicised a proposed expansion of this locally tested idea to build a wider high-speed network, owned by its users. Under the banner 'Trip the loop, make your switch, consume the net', the project was critical of, and opposed to, commercial telecoms providers. Partly conceived as a way to allow digital art practitioners to experiment with higher speed networks than the offerings available at the time could affordably allow, the project was taken up by a strongly technical crowd with strong free software ties. There were difficult technical problems to be overcome at both software and hardware levels. [...] The model was quickly replicated elsewhere, especially in the States, and there is now a burgeoning wireless freenetwork community around the world. While Consume was not the first community wireless group - it had been prefigured by the Bay Area Wireless Group<sup>4</sup> and others - it was perhaps the first to grab media attention and gain some kind of wider momentum. In the last year or so, the Freenetworking Movement has begun to coalesce around new concerns, with recent discourses putting freenetworks and ownership and control of media infrastructure in a freedom of expression context. Control of a network means ultimate control over network traffic. Consume argued that the only way to ensure an autonomous media was to ensure that the network ownership was distributed. [...]

One of the ideas expressed in the Consume Manifesto<sup>5</sup> was that of a meshed network. A meshed network is one with no 'top' where each node on the network is connected to a number of neighbours offering many possible routes across it. In contrast to a star topology, which has nodes connected to hubs that then link to backbones, a meshed network is resistant to being controlled, as constriction at one node causes data to find another route. In a star topology, constriction at one central node controls all transfer to nodes towards the edge of the network. Most commercial broadband networks such as ADSL are star topologies rather than mesh ones. There are a number of ways of achieving a meshed network, either it can be created automatically using ad hoc mesh routing, or it can be managed by a Network Administrator and stitched together with agreements between Network Neighbours.

The original idea of Consume was to create a metropolitan meshed network that would link users at the edge of the network together into a coherent local infrastructure. This connection would allow collective bargaining for back haul bandwidth, and a free local infrastructure that could support local content and an autonomous media. Finally, this meshed-edge network would provide a challenge to existing telecoms providers by being able to escape from the star topology and its built-in control points. Using an agreement between local network neighbours, the plan was to encourage a systemic de-centralisation and distribution of network ownership and operation. While there was a huge amount of activity by Freenetworkers, a managed or ad-hoc meshed network is not what emerged in London. What actually happened was that wireless freenetworks sprung up around activists, and, as the level of technical ability needed to install and operate nodes was initially high, this group of activists were people with a high degree of technical expertise. [...]

What we see as a result of this lack of node density is that the network topology that has mainly been adopted is not the meshed model, which requires an even distribution of nodes, but a star topology. I will call this the Access Point Model. An access point is a simple wireless network device that is not capable of forming a meshed network, due to lack of processing power and configurability. The access point is typically connected to an ADSL line and distributes the connection to those nearby. In this model it does not connect with its local network peers to form a local infrastructure, but does enable access to the internet by groups or people in a neighbourhood. This treats network access as a service like electricity or water. It is a centralised resource that is distributed outwards to 'consumers' at the edge of the network. As the gate keeper is the telco providing the ADSL connection, these networks are in effect extensions of the telco provider network rather than an alternative to it. While these networks are often offered for free for public use by their owners, this is often in breach of ADSL providers terms and conditions and as such these networks are susceptible to legal challenges (as has happened in the US), and price control. In fact by allowing users to share back haul costs, they really lower the cost of buying ADSL, and provide a lower cost



entry point for telecoms providers. This is understood by some ADSL providers and in Germany telcos bundle access points with ADSL, selling 70,000 units in 2003.<sup>6</sup>

While these networks do not in the long term do much to affect the ownership structure of the network, they have provided a huge wireless cloud that can be accessed by anybody, much of it offered for free by the network owners. In this way the collection of all these networks has created a de facto free network,



although not one that is autonomous. Many of the nodes installed are however reconfigurable and, given a significant shift in the density of installations, could be converted to form a contiguous meshed edge network. [...] The core problem is one of density. Not enough people are participating in freenetworking for local interconnection to occur. For the situation to change, the number of freenetworkers per square kilometer needs to increase. How can this be achieved?

Broadly, barriers to uptake need to be lowered, in particular the technical barriers. Running an internet network typically requires some specialist knowledge, perhaps an awareness of routing or Unix usage. While attempts to educate people through clinics such as the Consume Clinics<sup>7</sup> or programmes such as the University of Openness<sup>8</sup> are to be applauded, realistically these will not cause a quick shift in the level of knowledge in the population at large. Another way round this is to productise and automate, and this is happening both with products from the major suppliers, but also more specialist devices from Locust World,<sup>9</sup> or 4G systems,<sup>10</sup> that require little or no configuration and automatically build local meshes. Recently major manufacturers such as Linksys have started shipping Linux based access points (wet54g),<sup>11</sup> which may open the way for extremely low-cost devices capable of running a mesh network. A second barrier is the social barrier. In London in particular, people tend not to know their neighbours, with communities often grouped around interest rather than location, and this contributes to forming a social barrier to local connection. Node databases are designed to enable people to locate network peers but this

tends to locate only those who already know about freenetworking. To reach a wider audience formal agreements such as the Picopeering Agreement<sup>12</sup> are being created. These can provide a ready-made framework for people to negotiate local network connections, and a means of explanation by clearly representing the goals and conditions of participation in the network upfront.

Cost barriers are appreciably falling. WLAN technology is on the same ever-downward cost curve and ever-upward performance curve as computers; that is outlined in Moore's Law.<sup>13</sup> The final barrier is one of visibility and awareness. There is a perception that wireless freenetworking is a purely technical pursuit, in part due to the early focus on solution of technical issues over the last years. The question of why you would want to build a freenetwork and what you might use it for is largely unasked, at least in the public eye. A strong focus on what can be done with freenetworks, and an exploration of the spaces opened up creatively and otherwise, would help to drive adoption of the freenetwork, which in turn would create more space for activity. Given a greater density of participants, a meshed metropolitan network could emerge and give rise to a larger freenetwork, and an autonomous media infrastructure might become possible. [...]

WLAN equipment was originally developed for indoor use in the office and in the home, in order to un-tether laptops and ease the installation of networks by eliminating cable runs. Their use outdoor in hotspots and in freenetwork infrastructure was and still is perhaps a secondary usage of the technology, though a powerful one. While the existing wireless explosion is being attributed

to people wishing to spread their broadband to every room in the house, analysts suggest that 2004 will see the arrival of media adapters, that use WLANs to connect all the digital and networked devices that are beginning to appear in the home. Digital cameras, MP3 players, digital video cameras, TV recorders, baby monitors, cordless telephones, computers, games machines, et al, can all be linked together using home networks, and then connected to the external internet.

'In-Stat/MDR expects that many low-cost home networking specialists will roll out 802.11g wireless media adapters with a focus on media streaming, in 2004.'<sup>14</sup>

Such a home network is set to bridge the gap between networked devices in the home but also between the video camera and the television, the computer and the stereo. Linux users have for some time been building media servers for the living room, based around computers that blur all the format boundaries in home entertainment, and fan-less devices based on small mini-itx motherboards are appearing in all shapes and forms.<sup>15</sup> These types of devices are also appearing in models from familiar consumer electronics suppliers. Combined with a home network, digital content creation tools and media servers, there is the potential for the home to become a site of content creation on a wide scale. If this is combined with a local high speed free or extremely low cost broadband network infrastructure, then the conditions will exist for the creation of a user-driven media. This presents the possibility of a rich media version of what the internet has done for text and image, with all areas in the chain of media creation, post production, distribution and viewing available at the edge of the network rather than in central locations. Such developments may facilitate greater media autonomy.

If the view of the future outlined in the previous section sounds familiar, it is. The story about an autonomous media prefigures each wave of technological change in the media. As media developments have shown in the last few years, during a period when the Internet was supposed to free consumers from the

dominant media, we see that media ownership continues to be dominated by a small number of large players. The existence of the network has, rather than reversed the balance between 'consumer' and producer in favour of the consumer, perhaps allowed new spaces for the market driven media to inhabit.

At the same time the very same network has spawned developments such as peer to peer file sharing that has decimated music industry revenues, so this increasing fluidity has not been entirely a one-way street. The network cuts both ways. [...] The message of Consume was to take control of your own network infrastructure, let the ownership of the network expand from the personal non-marketed space of the home or office out into the wider public spaces. [...]

3

**NOTES:**

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10. 4G systems <<http://4g-systems.biz/>>.
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12. Picopeering Agreement <<http://picopeer.net/>>.
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## **SOCIETY IN AD-HOC MODE: DECENTRALISED, SELF-ORGANISING, MOBILE**

**Armin Medosch**

- + This article speculates on whether Western societies are in the process of adopting self-organisation in ad-hoc mode as a predominant organising principle. Can mobile and wireless media be used for a project of grass-roots democratic renewal? And can participatory, group-forming media help to overcome the paradigms of consumerism and broadcast media? The practice of free wireless networks and the resulting abstract notion of a Network Commons form the basis for a positive vision of the ad-hoc society as a society capable of inventing and constantly questioning its own rules.

The inspiration for this article and its title originally came from the technical domain. In WLAN-based wireless networks, there are two types of operation: infrastructure mode, where one node controls the communication of the entire network; and ad-hoc mode, in which each node has the same status as every other, acting as a router to receive and forward data. Such dynamically self-configuring networks in ad-hoc mode require no infrastructure and no central control. I also use 'ad-hoc mode' to mean something that is not contained in the term itself, stretching it to include the idea of self-organisation.

In public life, the term ad-hoc organisation is used when measures or institutions (committees, workers' councils, etc.) are created especially for a particular occasion. Ad-hoc organisation is used above all in crisis management and during periods of social upheaval. This can degenerate into populist political activism in

cases where new legislation that overturns historically consolidated principles is proposed in response to the events of the day.

Forms of ad-hoc organisation can be found in everyday business practice. For some time now, companies have been at pains to switch from top-down to bottom-up organisation in certain areas. This applies above all to local self-management of workgroups or business units, which still serve the company's overall business objectives, but with more freedom to select the means of achieving these goals than was traditionally the case in bureaucratic capitalist organisations. Self-regulation of this kind, however, does not encroach on the larger-scale framework of power in society.

In science, ad-hoc interpretations are sometimes employed when experiments or observations cannot be reconciled with a dominant theory. Instead of finding an alternative theoretical approach, this method tries to simply explain away the contradictions.

### **Techno-utopianism**

After these opening paragraphs, critical readers may be thinking that this is yet another attempt to build techno-utopian castles in the air. Techno-utopianism is a recurring theme in Western society. For more than five centuries, we have associated progress with 'unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery' of the world (Castoriades 1997a: 236).<sup>1</sup> The natural sciences are accorded a privileged role within society, due to the assumption that they study 'objective laws of nature' which can be harnessed to boost economic growth. Although the ideological character of science under the conditions of neo-capitalism has long since been identified and analysed by competent critics,<sup>2</sup> it persists stubbornly, taking on the traits of a dogmatic doctrine.

Media, understood as technologies for storing and transmitting knowledge, are credited with the ability to bring about societal change on their own - as if neither history, ideologies or dominant social strata with their interests and

power structures existed. The invention of new communications technologies always prompts an explosion of 'theories' on the extent to which they might not only strongly influence the development of society, but actually fundamentally reform it. Wireless broadcasting technology, radio, television and, most recently, computers and the Internet have served over the past hundred years as sources of inspiration and as bearers of hope for social revolution. It is not the idea that these technologies cause social change that needs criticising here, but the way in which the link between new technology and social change is imagined (Medosch 2004). The human factor is more or less ignored and social change is interpreted as a direct function of technology, reflecting a vulgar techno-determinism that is sadly hard to root out: only recently, the latest embodiment of techno-utopianism - the Internet bubble - exploded like a party cracker, leaving little behind but confetti and empty champagne bottles from dotcom launch events.

In contrast to this, I support the view that social progress really can result from dealing with communication technologies. And I insist on the term 'dealing with' as distinct from merely 'using' since it gives a better idea of the human activity involved, e.g. in the form of work. But this active element cannot be reduced to merely satisfying the dictates of utility and necessity. It is embedded in a concrete historical context and has specific objectives, which in turn result from a combination of manifold endeavours, wishes, needs and orientations.<sup>3</sup> The community develops a specific way of dealing with technology on the basis of these bundled criteria: the combination of technology and socio-political decisions gives rise to a 'project'. Later in this article, the Network Commons is presented as a significant project in this sense and compared with commercial projects in the field of communications technology.

### **Self-organisation**

The concept of self-organisation is commonly used in physics and molecular biology for the phenomenon of parts joining to form a larger whole, with no identifiable blueprint or regulating mechanism. In societal terms, the issue of self-organisation is linked to the fundamental question of forms of government.

Since the 1960s, and even before, the current form of government, representative democracy, has been challenged by calls for more grass-roots self-determination. What this might actually involve, however, often remained unclear. One of the few apparently coherent concepts for self-organisation was developed by the philosopher, psychoanalyst and political activist Cornelius Castoriadis.<sup>4</sup> His ideas centre on autonomy (self-determination) as opposed to heteronomy (outside control). In his view, self-organisation is not simply a better model for organisation or management, serving instead as a principle for:

‘the *permanent and explicit self-institution of society*; that is to say, a state in which the collectivity knows that its institutions are its own creation and has become capable of regarding them as such, of taking them up again and transforming them’ (Castoriadis 1997a: 30).

Castoriadis encourages us to understand that democracy involves more than just regular elections. The success of liberal democracies, he says, also relies on the existence of certain types of individuals who have internalised democratic values - politicians, journalists, civil servants, teachers, etc. - and on society’s ability to generate positive values drawn from the ‘radical social imaginary’. In other words, democracy cannot be taken for granted. The assumption that ‘it’s written in the constitution, so that’s the way it is’ is a fallacy; democracy must be constantly reborn, constantly filled with new content. According to Castoriadis (and many other social theorists) this constant rebirth of democracy has in the past been realised by revolutionary movements constantly challenging those in power, bringing the system down in times of crisis and forcing a process of renewal. In his view, however, this social dynamic came to a standstill in the 1970s. Over the past two or three decades, the struggle has ‘only’ been about particular interests, such as the green movement, women, lesbians and gays, and other minorities. Castoriadis is not saying that the fight for these individual causes is not worth fighting or that progress in these areas is not welcome; instead he points to the downside of this situation, i.e. the absence of an overall dynamic within society, focusing on the essence and character of society as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

### **Technological and social progress**

If one follows Castoriadis, then social progress begins with developments at the individual level and takes place not according to criteria imposed from outside, but based on each person’s abilities and possibilities in a process of active ethical self-reflection. Only this kind of development can lead to meaningful collective development within society as a whole - to social progress. In my opinion, one indication of such progress is the way conflicts and problems within society are resolved: whether this can be achieved in a civilised manner through political debate, the formation of opinions, discussion and voting; or whether it is necessary to occupy factories, as has been the case, for example, in recent years in Argentina. Another indication would be which positive values a society is capable of generating; positive not in the sense of morally good, but in the sense of values as ethical choices against a free, secular, self-determined background, i.e. influenced by neither religious nor ideological dogma. Today, developments in the technological and social realms are progressing at different speeds, to put it mildly: while technology celebrates one triumph after the other (often referred to as ‘revolutions’), in social terms it is doubtful whether we have any progress to show at all.

### **The breeding ground for technological development**

While technology is credited with the ability to change the world, the breeding ground for the development of technology is often left out of the picture. New technologies do not fall from the sky, they are produced by human beings, in a concrete socio-historical context. Technological development takes place not in the name of democracy but under the conditions of capitalism, two things which are often mixed up or automatically equated with each other. This means that the primary objective of new technologies (besides those used for military purposes or as instruments of power) must be to serve economic growth. In this light, technology is far from being a neutral ‘tool’, as it is unfortunately so often billed. Decisions about which forms of fundamental research to pursue and which technologies to market are an expression of a social project - which is where Castoriadis’ radical social imaginary comes back into play: this needs

mentioning here to avoid a purely sociological interpretation. Technologies can be understood as expressions of social relations - an almost totally automated factory, for example, expresses different social relations to a skilled craftsman's workshop. Technologies can also be read as metaphors, as discursive models.<sup>6</sup>

### **Ad-hoc mode in crisis management**

Ad-hoc mode cannot be automatically associated with the principles of grassroots democracy and self-organisation. Even at the highest levels of government, finance and business, ad-hoc mode is in use, as highlighted during the Asian financial crisis in 1998. At this time, central banks, institutional investors and governments were confronted with the problem of 'contagion'. The bursting of a local speculation bubble in Thailand, mainly limited to the property sector, first sent the Thai currency into free fall and then went on to infect the rest of Asia's 'tiger' economies one after the other. Investors identified structural similarities with the Thai system and withdrew their trust from these economies. When this 'Asian virus' within the financial system threatened to spread to Russia and Brazil, the alarm bells began ringing in Washington, New York, London, Paris and Frankfurt. The international community of bankers and finance ministers reacted with a series of meetings, mostly under the auspices of the G7/8, to halt the looming global financial crisis. But these ad-hoc meetings of small groups of leading experts from the most powerful industrialised nations lacked the slightest legal status under international law. The G7/8 itself is an ad-hoc organisation, a club of rich countries where entry is by invitation only. The G7/8 summits of heads of government and finance ministers are often also attended by technocrats from the boards of central banks, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and organisations little known among the general public such as the Paris Club, a body of international creditors for states. These meetings usually take place behind closed doors. Journalists (with the exception of lobby journalists from a few agencies), non-government organisations and representatives of the 'Third World' are rarely granted access to these meetings, dealing with economic issues that are eminently political and of global importance.

This reference to the global financial system also acts as a reminder of the connection between telematics networks and international politics. The computer networks on which the global financial system is based were essential for the creation of a global playing field of financial speculation in real time, mobilising and accelerating capital so that individual governments have less and less scope for controlling their own national economies. On one hand, the G7/8 summits are a product of globalisation, created in response to global economic issues, and on the other hand, they have increasingly become a driving force behind economic globalisation itself.

### **Protest movement in ad-hoc mode**

The fact that key decisions shaping global economic policy are seen as being made in such elite circles, that are neither transparent nor subject to democratic control and accountability, is one of the main criticisms levelled by the anti-globalisation movement. For years now, all major G7/8 summits have drawn large gatherings of protesters without a single ideology, without leaders, uniting a broad range of interest groups, from Indian farmers resisting the obligation to buy genetically modified seed, through to union groups and a myriad of citizens' action and anarchist groups. At the conference of the World Trade Organisation to launch the so-called Millennium Round in Seattle in 1999, the protest movement reached critical mass for the first time, with over 50,000 demonstrators. Aware that their concerns, positions and objectives would receive only grossly distorted coverage, if any, in the established media, the protesters set up an Independent Media Centre (IMC) that was to give rise to the network of Indymedia websites and groups that now operates worldwide. The image, sound and text material posted on the Internet by Indymedia during the demonstrations in Seattle was instrumental in invalidating the official media version of the protesters as violent and lacking a thematic focus, bringing about a change of mood so that suddenly, the focus of attention was on excessive police violence.

Since then, the politicians and technocrats attending G7/8 summits and similar events have entrenched themselves behind ever larger police presences, high

fences and exclusion zones. From the protesters' point of view, these barriers have come to symbolise the divide between governments and those they govern. In July 2001, over 300,000 anti-globalisation protesters came to the G8 summit in Genoa. This event saw the tragic death of Carlo Giuliani, a demonstrator who was hit in the head by a bullet apparently fired by a young *carabiniere*.<sup>7</sup> In Genoa, police units stormed the building where Indymedia had its offices, beating those present and confiscating computers and video cassettes. The legal repercussions of these events are still unfolding, involving both Indymedia staff and members of the security forces. Ever since, the Berlusconi government has been trying to demonise Indymedia in Italy as an extremist left-wing medium. Subsequent G7/8 summits have been held at increasingly isolated locations, most recently on Sealand, a hermetically sealed island off the coast of the American state of Georgia.

The anti-globalisation movement uses the Internet as a means of communication, organisation and mobilisation. As a movement with no single focus, it is eminently suited to ad-hoc mode, not just on a technical level. During the demonstrations themselves, attempts are made to distract the attention of the security forces and to overstretch their resources with numerous, often carnival-like spontaneous actions, while directing media attention to the places where organised state power is seen to break down or to expose itself by overreacting. In other words, the technique of protest itself is an ad-hoc technique, which is not really new,<sup>8</sup> but worth stressing here nonetheless.

### **The crisis of democracy**

The hysterical reaction of state power to the successes of the anti-globalisation movement is a sign that governments and their expertocracies genuinely feel challenged. Strikingly, both sides seem to agree that the key to the representation of democratically legitimated power is no longer to be found at the classical locus of democracy, the parliament. Demonstrators no longer march on parliaments or town halls, as it would clearly be meaningless to protest there. Governments take refuge behind their legitimacy as democratically elected

bodies and behind powerful security apparatuses. The fact that both sides in the conflict are moving away from the place traditionally considered as the centre of democracy illustrates that society is already operating in ad-hoc mode to a certain degree. This can also be interpreted as symptomatic of a crisis of democracy and of political and media representation. Both sides court media attention, with each side marshalling its own media channels, the mainstream establishment press on the one hand, and Indymedia and related projects on the other. These developments point to the ambiguity of ad-hoc mode, a form of political organisation used both by neo-liberal elites and by their critics and opponents. Rather than praising ad-hoc mode as a form of organisation worth aspiring to per se, this article presents it as the (perhaps necessary) reaction of a society in the throes of crisis and upheaval.

### **The Internet as a training ground for the ad-hoc society**

The technical and communicative two-way structure of the Internet makes it possible to break out of the pattern of broadcast media. Within this pattern of communication, viewers are imagined as consumers whose putative needs the media attempt to satisfy. The viewers are subjected to one-way communication coming from the broadcaster, there is no adequate return channel.<sup>9</sup> The problem here is not just the creation of one-way communication in purely technical terms; more problematic are the resulting social, psychological and (not least) economical relations between the central broadcaster and its viewers. The audience is part of a closed communications set-up that does more than simply provide entertainment or information. In a certain sense, it also helps produce the audience as such - from the 'television family' of the 1970s to the hyperactive singles of today. This pattern is used by both commercial and public service channels, quite independently of any differences there may be between the two concerning standards of ethical journalism.

With its strongly distributed network topology, the Internet allows 'symmetrical' two-way communication between individuals and groups (i.e. as equal partners in technical terms) with no possibility of exerting social control from any single

point. However, possibilities for control also exist on the Internet, whose structures are less decentralised and its hierarchies less flat than originally suggested in the days of Internet euphoria. This is reason enough for me not to hail the Internet as a panacea. The step from the off button on the TV remote control to the mouse button for the Internet is not about to wipe out seven decades of conditioning by broadcast media and other sources of social signification. I am not claiming that communication on the Internet will lead automatically to a renewal of democracy by making everyone discover virtual communities and, through them, to found participatory grass-roots democratic movements, leading directly and inevitably to a renewal of democracy in the west. I emphasise this particularly because such abilities were attributed to the Internet in its early days and are still in circulation. By attributing the power to bring about social change to media communication as an isolated factor, one is once again following the techno-determinist idea of utopia and fetishising technological communications media. Having said this, the Internet does have the potential to promote social progress, if it is made into a 'project' as described above.

Besides access to information and cultural content, the most important property of the Internet is its capacity for promoting the creation of social communities, since the properties of the medium both facilitate and actively favour the formation of groups. The distributed, meshed structure of the network enables interest groups to establish communications with each other in various different constellations, as illustrated by a wide range of online communities. We have already mentioned the anti-globalisation movement, but other groups also find in the Internet a space for communications that is (for the time being) free: established non-governmental organisations, hobby communities, lobbies, activists across the political spectrum from the right, the left and the loosely defined 'centre'. Whatever the field of activity, when launching a project, it is now common practice to begin by setting up a mailing list and, more recently, a wiki (a web-based platform for geographically distributed collaboration). These online collaboration tools aid communication and discussion, self-organisation

and mobilisation, and in some cases, even direct political action in the form of electronic protest (cf. Medosch 2002). If it was formerly possible to say, 'Show me what you read and I'll tell you who you are', the updated version might be 'Tell me which mailing lists you're on and I'll tell you who you are' (although ironically, the content of mailing lists often consists of book titles).

This group-forming and group-reinforcing property of the Internet can be interpreted as a breeding and training ground for the ad-hoc society. The Internet offers the possibility of associating with others and of acting as a politicised group. In this context, politicised implies self-awareness as a group or collective with shared views, regardless of political orientation (right-wing extremists also use the Internet). Communication within these groups forms new publics; 'new' because these publics would not exist without the Internet, but also 'new' in a non-trivial sense, because they differ from the idea of the public in representative democracy. On the Internet, freedom of the media can be practised directly and actively. Instead of a single media public, however, there are many. In spite of their relatively small numbers, these fragmented online publics have the power to put issues on the agenda that would otherwise be ignored by mass media and politics. As the example of the anti-globalisation movement and Indymedia shows, traditional politics and its loyal media are sometimes literally swept along by the power of Internet publics to dictate the issues.

### **Mobile telephony and mobile, wireless Internet**

At present, technical progress in telecommunications and computer science (in their combined form as 'telematics') is on the verge of a leap in quality. Just over a decade ago, the Internet was opened up for use by businesses and private individuals - the Internet's progress from an Arcadia for network philosophers to the golden calf of e-commerce is still fresh in our minds, and the memories are not all good. Today we are seeing the Internet coupled with wireless technology, the unwiring of the network. For the first time, this will create a ubiquitous network. The Internet leaves homes and offices and goes out onto the street, into parks, cafés and squares. This development is being driven by two

fundamentally different positions: by mobile phone companies that are gambling billions on the installation of third generation (3G) mobile networks, and by network enthusiasts who are using WLAN and do-it-yourself technologies to build independent network infrastructures.<sup>10</sup> The main difference between these two positions is not the technology used, which at an elementary level is quite similar, but the uses to which it is put, the way it is embedded in society and the imaginations it generates.

### **Mobilisation by mobile phone**

Before WLAN and 3G, good old mobile phones already offered a certain amount of potential for mobilisation. Last year, there was a burst of media excitement surrounding 'flash mobs,' groups arranging by mobile phone to appear at a certain time at a certain place. This fashion began in the USA and was initially about nothing more than 'fun', which is probably why interest in it subsided so quickly. The participants' lack of social cohesion illustrates less the potential of a self-organised ad-hoc society and more the trauma of an atomised society whose lack of cohesion is only highlighted by the relatively helpless gesture of a spontaneous gathering for no purpose.

Mobile phones, and especially text messages (SMS), were the preferred means of organisation for the petrol strike that broke out spontaneously in Great Britain in September 2000. This was a wildcat strike in which the unions played no part. It was organised by freight carriers, farmers, taxi drivers and other trade groups who rely on motorisation. As they saw it, increases in fuel tax were placing unacceptable burdens on them. With blockades at the entrances to refineries and slow-driving truck convoys on motorways, they brought large areas of the country to a standstill within just a few days. The government and the media were taken completely by surprise - by the strike, by the speed with which it spread and by the chain reactions it triggered. On the very first day, long queues formed at petrol stations as motorists tried to fill their tanks before the effects of the strike began to make themselves felt. In no time at all, the filling stations ran out of petrol. On the second day, people began panic buying at supermarkets

when it became clear that the strike would have an impact on the supply chain. The government could barely conceal its own panic and made concessions to the strikers by slightly lessening the tax increases. These concessions were not very far-reaching, however, and it is possible that the strikers broke off their campaign out of fear of their own success. No one had been prepared for the kind of chain reactions that were triggered by this mobile ad-hoc protest.

Text messaging also sealed the fate of the last Conservative government in Spain, following its claim, in spite of the evidence, that the Basque separatist organisation ETA was behind the Madrid bombings. When the official media lie became untenable, amidst ongoing attempts by the government and loyal media to uphold it, one day was enough, the Saturday before election day, for word to get round by SMS to teach the Conservatives a lesson by voting for the Social Democrats, who until then had only been given an outside chance in the polls.

In his book *Smart Mobs* (2002),<sup>11</sup> the American author Howard Rheingold collected numerous examples of this kind of mobilisation. In his presentation at Ars Electronica 2003, he stressed that he deliberately chose the title *Smart Mobs* instead of something like *Smart Communities*, as he thought the more dangerous-sounding 'mobs' gave a better idea of the unbridled character of this new electronic socio-reality. Rheingold's previous successful book was called *Virtual Communities*, a title he now finds too harmless.

### **The network commons**

In terms of their level of social sophistication, these examples of mobilisation by mobile phone hardly go beyond mob status. Neither flash mobs nor smart mobs are any help in realising the kind of autonomous society envisaged by Castoriadis. The still marginal practice of free wireless networking, on the other hand, opens up a whole different approach to dealing with the technologies of wireless networks.

Groups like Consume and Free2air in London, Freifunk.net in Berlin and

Funkfeuer.at in Vienna propose a decentralised, self-organising network model. The elementary units in such a network are the individual (wireless) nodes. Such a node could consist, for example, of anyone with an ADSL connection and a WLAN access point, or of any local user community with a permanent Internet connection and a local (wireless) network. By reaching agreements and connecting their nodes with each other, such groups and individuals can create a larger wireless network, a free data cloud. Small-scale networks of this kind now cover parts of certain neighbourhoods, like the East End Net in London or WLAN Friedrichshain in Berlin. Technically and socially ambitious projects are trying to create wireless backbones to link these free network islands (Berlin Backbone, ConsumeX). In technical terms, there are no known obstacles to the expansion of such networks to cover entire boroughs, cities, regions or countries. Barriers do exist, however, within society, not least because such networks would undermine the business model of the mobile telephony providers.

Unlike the mobile phone networks, which are centrally planned, built, managed and operated with the aim of maximising profit, the free networks are based on the model of a network commons. The network commons is a special instance of the digital commons, a term which in recent years has become a central concept in the debate over intellectual property. The use of the term network commons underlines that this is not just about technical networks as carriers of information, but also about facilitating and multiplying options for human action.

The network commons is the result of collaboration between formally independent participants. All physical components of a network node forming part of the commons are managed by the owners/users of that node. In their internal relations, these nodes do not depend on commercial network structures as they are able to use a licence-free part of the spectrum for transmission. Within these free wireless networks, the users enjoy the luxury of relatively good transmission rates. The communications and services offered within the network are shaped by the users themselves, as are all inter-network principles

and conventions. This free data cloud can also be described as the intranet of a grass-roots network cooperative, although it will usually be connected at least at one point to the global Internet. In purely pragmatic terms, there are several advantages for participants: within the intranet, no costs arise for broadband communication, and shared use of Internet connections means lower costs there too. But the real relevance of these free wireless networks is in their status as role models. They stand as examples of how the world could deal with telematics in a fundamentally different way.

The network commons calls for certain conditions to be met, some of which overlap with the constitutive elements of the digital commons. The first precondition is the existence of open standards. Communications on the Internet are based on the Internet protocols, the most important of which are TCP and IP. Although both were originally developed for the US military, the research results have since been made available to the public. On the basis of this tradition, all Internet protocols are free and publicly accessible. A further precondition is the existence of free software and a licensing system to protect it. The General Public License (GPL) grants free usage of software, access to its source code, and authorisation to modify and redistribute the software under the condition that the licensing terms continue to apply. The viral character of GPL has led to the existence of a growing pool of free software, from the GNU/Linux operating system through to a wide range of network services and applications. Most key Internet functionality can now be provided without using proprietary software.

Inspired by GPL, other copyleft licenses have now been developed, including the Open Content license and the Creative Commons licenses.<sup>12</sup> Besides software, they also protect individual types of content such as images, texts, pieces of music. Growing numbers of artists, writers and musicians are using these licenses to put their creative output in the public domain. An important aspect here is that both free software and free content break down the barrier between producer and consumer. Every reader is a potential writer.<sup>13</sup>

### Open spectrum

Up to this point, the network commons and the digital commons overlap. But as well as open standards and free software, networks also need a transmission medium. Wireless networks based on the WLAN standard use a loophole in frequency regulations. The electromagnetic spectrum is divided up by state regulatory authorities into bands reserved for the use of specific wireless technologies and users, e.g. for public television broadcasters, emergency services or the military. The owners of such exclusive usage rights have a strong economic interest in holding onto them. Which is why the spectrum currently appears more or less 'full'.

One exception is the so-called ISM band (industrial, scientific and medical). This band includes one range of frequencies between 2.4 and 2.5 GHz that is used by WLAN equipment. Most of the world's governments have decided to make this part of the spectrum license-free and open it up to all users. As a result, quality cannot be guaranteed - no one in this band has special rights and cases of overuse may occur, resulting in disturbances. But this also means no one has to apply for authorisation and this band can be used free of charge. The experiment of opening up the ISM band for general use is now considered a success. In the United States, a lobby has come together under the Open Spectrum banner to demand the opening up of the entire spectrum. These American advocates of the open spectrum idea argue that technical progress in the field of spread spectrum technology and 'cognitive' radio have made conventional frequency regulation obsolete, allowing spectrum regulation to be left up to devices involved.

### Self-organisation as a basic principle

Unlike free software, which can be copied and distributed at minimal cost once it has been written, free wireless networks require an initial investment in materials and *ongoing* investment in upkeep. This involves the acquisition, operation and maintenance of the equipment used as part of the network commons, plus an investment in social self-organisation. To qualify as a network at all, there must be more than one node, i.e. it is necessary to create links. This process

involves finding partners interested in linking up and then exploring the terrain, since there must be a line of sight between the antennae of any two nodes. It is also necessary to agree on rules for common usage of the network. Here it is important to achieve a balance between individual needs and liberties on the one hand and sustainable functioning of the network on the other. The dangers and stumbling blocks are many and varied. Uncurbed file-sharing can bring even the best wireless network to its knees. Added to which, the tightening of legislation concerning monitoring and control of content poses the question of liability for the actions of those using the network.

In 2002, a group of networkers began developing a framework agreement designed to outline basic conventions for data exchange in free networks, the Pico Peering Agreement.<sup>14</sup> The group thought about what actually constitutes the basis of this resource known as a 'free network' and came to the conclusion that it boils down to a willingness to allow others free transit of data. You can cross my 'virtual property', and in return I can cross yours too. The Pico Peering Agreement regulates the principles of free data transit and implicitly describes the nature of 'freedom' in a free network (as opposed to a sponsored no-cost network). Similar to the General Public License for free software, the Pico Peering Agreement should function as a kind of seal of quality for free networks. The Pico Peering Agreement is the first step towards a constitution for the network commons, a declaration of basic rights and duties.

### Mobile ad-hoc networks

This ideal of a highly distributed network not owned by any single party but available to all for common use is being pursued at the technical level through the development of dynamic routing protocols. Like the standard Internet protocols, this technology was originally developed in the context of military research programmes but has now found its way via the universities onto the street. MANET (Mobile Ad-hoc NETWORKing) denotes to a family of protocols which allow mobile devices to recognise each other and establish a network with no central control position. Hackers in Berlin and London, as well as small IT

companies,<sup>15</sup> are now working to perfect these protocols, which should soon reach a marketable state of development. What this makes possible in theory, and which has already been tested on the scale of up to 30 nodes, is the creation of ad-hoc networks with laptops or other mobile computers (handhelds or PDAs), enabling data transfer as well as voice communication. There is no (technical) reason why such protocols should not be integrated into mobile phones. This means that in theory, anyone carrying a mobile phone would become the owner of a fully-functional telephony and Internet node. Every subscriber would turn into a walking telephone company. In this scenario, the infrastructures owned by mobile telephone companies become superfluous, with the possible exception of long-distance cross-country lines. This model could be the key to a future of provider-free telematics.

The technology itself, however, is (in one sense and one sense only) neutral. Mobile ad-hoc networking can just as well be used for communications between tanks, helicopters and infantry units. What count are the applications and the intentions. The network commons is sustained by the desire to create a network on the basis of free cooperation and self-made rules. This expression of personal freedom of will by means of technical and social networking is a value in its own right that forms the content of the network commons 'project'. Networks of this kind that are motivated by a collective desire/need for a site of free, self-determined communication, could become necessary in the long term in order to protect free speech and the freedom of the media on the Internet, following the increasing domination of the network by oligopolistic interests.

### **Mobile telephony vs. network commons**

Now let us compare the functioning and inner structure of the network commons with third generation mobile telephone networks. In the network commons, there is no metering of data traffic because the principle of free data transit applies. Mobile telephony operators, on the other hand, meter every individual activity, data volume, online time, locations, incoming and outgoing calls, etc. Besides providing information for billing, the metering process itself is a cost-intensive

procedure, in turn making communications as a whole more expensive. Under these conditions, the gift economy that is widespread on the Internet is hardly possible. The storage of such data also has implications for the safeguarding of private information. Data are stored in the interests of economic gain (data mining, user profiles) and in the interest of criminal prosecution. The existence of large amounts of information about users gathered without their active consent represents a significant potential for social repression and generates a climate of fear and paranoia.

The mobile phone networks are centrally planned, built and managed. Once again, the users are considered purely as consumers who purchase temporary access to an operator's network. In the scenario of the network commons, this notion of 'end users' consuming information has been done away with and replaced by the principle of nodes that participate in symmetrical communication and contribute to the value of the network.

While free networks use a part of the spectrum that is exempt from licensing obligations, the mobile phone operators had the bad luck of having to buy the usage rights for spectrum at auctions held at the peak of the new economy boom, causing the necessary investments to skyrocket. Some operators, including Deutsche Telekom, were almost ruined by this, and the short-sighted approach taken by politicians caused long-term damage to the development of telematic communications. Now, the operators are under pressure to squeeze as much revenue as possible out of their newly built networks.

### **The society imagined by the mobile telephony paradigm**

Under these conditions, mobile communications have become the spearhead of post-modern capitalism, which is enlightening not only in terms of the current state of that system, but also concerning the ways in which technology is developed. It is assumed that today's 'consumer' is a difficult customer. To be able to survive in the marketplace, the telcos must be interested in every individualistic whim and fancy of their client-subjects. The various services on

offer are structured and finely tuned according to the tastes, preferences and interests of this imaginary clientele, also taking incomes and lifestyles into account. As well as shaping price plans, this also influences the design and functionality of the devices developed, e.g. particularly eye-catching and target-group-oriented phones, the option of calling up content services, managing addresses and appointments on the mobile phone, etc. Functions of this kind are not merely technical features, they are based on the implicit construction of types within the repertoire of the consumer age, from the mobile executive who works everywhere and all the time, to the teenage skateboarder who wants to take her entire MP3 collection with her wherever she goes. Work and leisure form the pillars of the society imagined by the mobile telephony paradigm.

In their run on the purses and wallets of their customers, the mobile phone operators found themselves mutating into content providers - with personalised ringtones, news services, and music, pictures and videos. This is reminiscent of the early days of telephony a century ago, when attempts were also made to sell entertainment and news via this new medium, a business model which failed then and which is very probably doomed to fail again.

### **Brave new wireless world**

The device manufacturers and telcos clearly assume that their clientele are visual people. The new generation of mobile phones can take and send both still and moving images. This has interesting effects whose consequences do not yet seem to have been fully thought through. It means that the entire world (or at least the parts accessible from wireless networks) can be captured and communicated in audiovisual form. This could degenerate into a panopticon, a world of constant observation and surveillance where public and private, personal and socially open spaces become interwoven with the global network and potentially controlled from central points within that network. But it also means that every mobile phone becomes a mobile television camera that can transmit images of public interest to TV stations live for further broadcast. The current high prices are the only remaining obstacle to such a mania of mobile video telephony.

There is a trend towards further enhancement of mobile devices by turning phones into electronic wallets, and with new applications such as biometric data, a mobile phone can also be used as a method of proving one's identity - wallet and passport in one, managed by the multinational corporation of your choice?

With mobile phones, we move in a closed world of proprietary systems whose inner workings are kept secret, subject to the ubiquitous non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) imposed by private sector R&D departments. Many of the freedoms that have resulted from the linking of freely programmable PCs and the Internet do not exist in commercial wireless networks. In this field, there is an urgent need for open-source solutions.

### **Location-based services and the potential of mobile telematics<sup>16</sup>**

The new mobile devices are location-aware. Using the method of triangulation, network operators can pinpoint the location of a given mobile phone, or its owner. Besides the resulting potential for surveillance on the part of prosecuting authorities, this also opens up new sources of revenue for the industry in the form of location-specific services. Often this will mean no more than location-specific advertising spam, but it could also involve genuinely useful services. The ability to pinpoint devices is already being used, for example, to supply rescue services with the coordinates of callers who are unable to state their exact position, as may be the case with children or people in shock.

In basic terms, location awareness means that real space and the space of electronic communications ('cyberspace') are made to overlap. Information can be fixed to specific points, as a source or target for information. The real three-dimensional world is enriched with information, with the result referred to in technical jargon as 'augmented space'. Groups like Locative Media,<sup>17</sup> a loose-knit international association of artists, authors and developers, are attempting to derive artistic capital from this situation. They develop projects for collaborative mapping, surveying not only geographical but also social features. Instead of just focussing on specific topics on the wirebound Internet, discussion forums

are now also possible on the basis of people's location. Group communications can develop spontaneously on the basis of geographical proximity. Social communities are beginning to digitally document real world environments according to their specific interests. This results, for example, in alternative city guides and new forms of 'computer games' where players no longer sit at home behind drawn curtains but move about in the real world outside.

Many of these developments are still at an experimental stage, with serious obstacles posed both by the pricing structures and secrecy policies of the network operators and by insufficient coverage with free networks. Nonetheless, these modest beginnings show that not everything in the brave new wireless world has to be surveillance and advertising. The author and Locative Media co-founder Ben Russell<sup>8</sup> speaks of mobile devices as embodiments of a 'dense network of social relations.' He is referring to the management of personal data by mobile devices and the way they map systems of social relations as well as actually enabling relationships to be established. Models like 'Friend Of A Friend' (FOAF) enable the cross-indexing of addresses with personal profiles and the definition of personal priorities and interests. Such patterns can be used as a basis for developing applications for emergent ad-hoc social networks. At this point, whether these applications will primarily serve hedonistic needs, artistic objectives or socio-political movements is still impossible to say.

We find ourselves at the beginning of a development towards an ad-hoc society in terms of communications technologies. Soon, there will be bandwidth 'in the air' everywhere and computational power is astonishingly cheap by western standards. Which applications and social practices will result from this, making it possible to speak of an ad-hoc society in social terms, still remains to be seen. In technical terms, there are ever fewer obstacles to the development of grass-roots democratic self-organisation with the aid of telematics. It is possible, for example, to imagine a society in which considerably less centralised planning is required because most things can be resolved locally. Mobile telematics facilitates participatory citizenship and ad-hoc organisation at local level. Between this

local self-organising level and the national level, conference lines could be employed for democratic voting. Instead of amounting to an election every few years, politics could become a process integrated into the life of communities.

Whether or not this potential can actually be realised is another question. With the pricing policies and the command and control structures of the mobile phone companies, and the social models they produce, a positive utopia of an ad-hoc society is hard to imagine. For this and other reasons, it would be desirable if mobile telephony were to be restructured according to the model of a network commons. Although at present, the network commons really only exists in embryonic form, this seed carries within it the potential for restructuring the whole. The network commons model shows how advanced communications technologies could be harnessed for social progress, and not just for the financial gain of the few. It also offers an alternative model for the development of socially meaningful and desirable technologies. Whether the model is scalable, whether it can be transferred to larger communities, depends on whether the idea meets with sufficient approval and which social values form the basis for its further development.

The movement for the establishment of free networks is not alone in this struggle for more autonomy. The developers of free software pursue similar objectives, and as I have shown with reference to the digital commons, these two movements share a great deal. The legal experts at Creative Commons are now trying to transfer this model to all cultural and intellectual property by offering licenses for the free distribution and open modification of digital cultural artefacts. Growing numbers of artists, musicians and authors are taking advantage of this. Tech-savvy activists are developing technologies specifically tailored to independent media from the anti-globalisation camp. In all of these projects, the issue is not the realisation of a technical principle or the triumph of pseudo-rational mastery of the world, but the widening of the scope for human action. This form of freedom, and not individualistic whims, is what motivates these efforts. All these 'projects' favour one another, learn from one another,

develop alliances and links, and thus constantly expand their critical potential. At this point, it is impossible to paint a definitive picture of this development or to predict its outcome. What I hope I have achieved is to portray society in ad-hoc mode as a concrete, feasible project and one that is worth striving for.

♫

*Translated from German by Nicholas Grindell.*

#### NOTES:

1. Here and on the following pages, Castoriadis continues to link the unlimited expansion of 'productive forces', 'progress', etc., with the institutional forms of businesses, bureaucratic hierarchies, political parties and states. He describes the irrational origins of this fixation on rationality, which he reveals as a pseudo-rationality, as one of the basic ills of capitalist societies.
2. Building on the work of Thomas Kuhn (1996 [1962]), Paul Feyerabend (1993 [1973]) demonstrates the inconsistency of scientific method, in particular the principle that accords a given theory scientific status if it matches observed facts.
3. At this point, Castoriadis would speak of the 'magma of the radical social imagination' (for example, Castoriadis 1997d).
4. Cornelius Castoriadis took part in the attempted Communist coup in Greece in 1944. This experience turned him into an opponent of Stalinism and he went to France, where he joined the Trotskyites, soon leaving again due to their authoritarian tendencies. He then founded the group 'Socialisme ou barbarie' and the publication of the same name. In his work with this group, he developed his ideas of self-organisation, using the example of wildcat strikes, among others. He was one of the first radical socialists in France at the time to publicly criticise Stalinism, as well as publishing critiques of Marx's historical determinism.
5. These last sentences are very freely paraphrased and summarised, drawing on various paragraphs and articles in *The Castoriadis Reader* (in particular, Castoriadis 1997b & c).
6. In this vein, Paul N. Edwards studies the history of computers from the viewpoint of Cold War thinking with its geographically, politically and discursively 'closed worlds.' (Edwards 1996).
7. I say 'apparently' because a second version of these events exists, according to which another gunman may have been involved. This conspiracy theory is nourished by a mysterious, near-fatal car accident involving the officer who allegedly fired the shot.
8. With slogans like 'Under the cobblestones, the beach!' the student protests of May 1968 established once and for all the use of imaginative and artistic forms of protest.
9. I say 'adequate' here because channels for return communication or feedback do exist, from phone-ins during studio discussions or the voting procedure in *Big Brother* through to viewer ratings and other instruments of media market research. But these return channels were set up by the broadcasters, tailored to their wishes and needs, and it is also they who evaluate the results.
10. The practice of *Free Networks*; the research carried out for my book *Freie Netze* made a significant contribution to the development of ideas concerning self-organisation and technically and socially symmetrical forms of communication in networked systems (Medosch 2003).
11. There is also a substantial website devoted to this book with a regularly updated web-log and an extensive bibliography at <<http://www.smartmobs.com>>.
12. <<http://www.creativecommons.org>>.
13. This is a reference to Walter Benjamin's call for the author's role to include the production of more writers (Benjamin 2002).
14. <<http://www.picopeer.net/PPA-english.html>>.
15. One solution is offered, for example, by MeshCube from 4GSystems, <<http://www.meshcube.org>>. This development was influenced by ideas from the free network community, which shows

how alternative ways of dealing with technology can lead to new innovations tailored to the objectives of such communities.

16. At this point, the distinction between mobile phone and free WLAN networks ends, since the possibilities described below exist for both types of application.

17. Locative Media Website <<http://locative.net>>.

18. Interview with Ben Russell, conducted by students of Ravensbourne College for Design and Communication, published in the student magazine *Mazine*, London, June 2004. A good introduction to Ben Russell's ideas is given by the *Headmap Manifesto* (1999), available at <<http://www.headmap.org>>.

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Economising Culture



# SIGHTINGS

**Raqs Media Collective**



A boat changes course at sea, dipping temporarily out of the radar of a nearby coast guard vessel. A cargo of contraband people in the hold, fleeing war, or the aftermath of war, or the fifth bad harvest in a row, or a dam that flooded their valley, or the absence of social security in the face of unemployment, or a government that suddenly took offence at the way they spelt their names, study the contours of an unknown coastline in their minds, experiment with the pronunciations of harbour names unfamiliar to their tongues. Their map of the world is contoured with safe havens and dangerous border posts, places for landing, transit and refuge, anywhere and everywhere, encircled and annotated in blue ink. A geography lesson learnt in the International University of Exile.



Figure One: The Alien Navigates a Boat at Sea

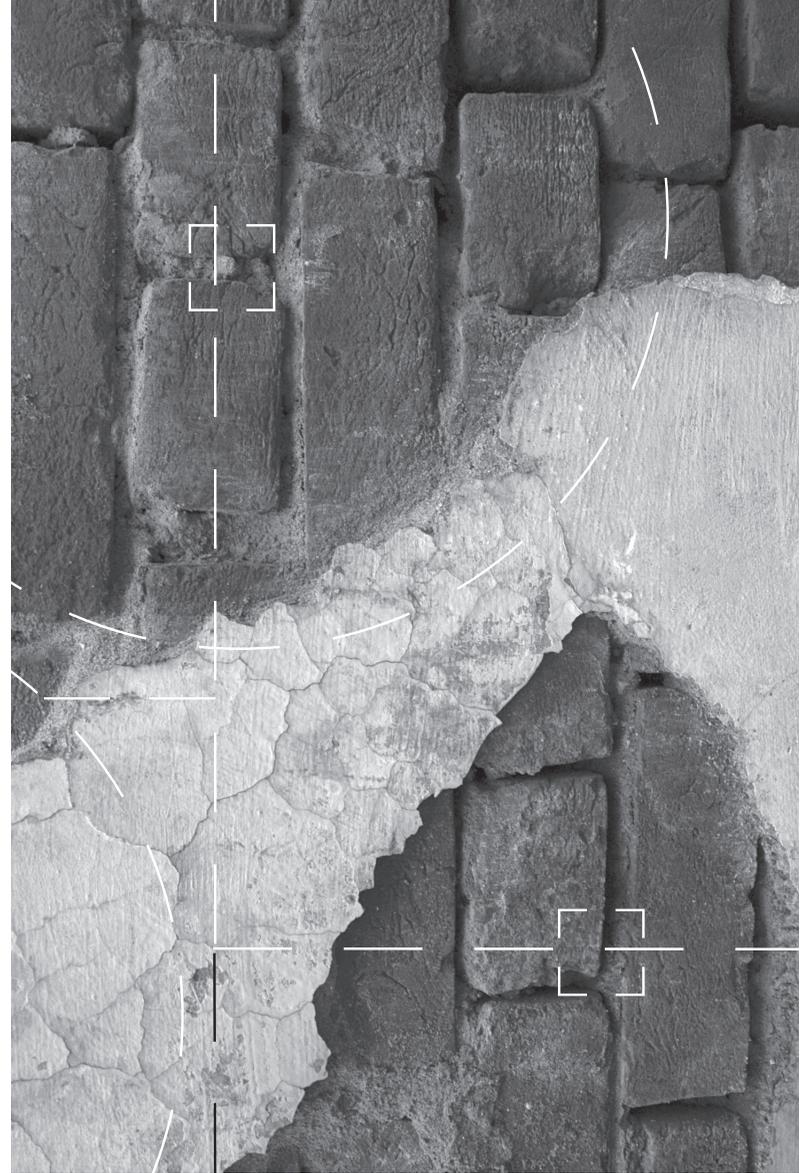


Figure Two: The Squatter builds a Tarpaulin Shelter

Tarpaulin, rope, a few large plastic drums, crates, long poles of seasoned bamboo, and quick eyes and skilled hands, create a new home. A migrant claims a patch of fallow land, marked "property of the state" in the city. Then comes the tough part: the search for papers, the guerrilla war with the Master Plan for a little bit of electricity, a little bit of water, a delay in the date of demolition, for a few scraps of legality, a few loose threads of citizenship. The learning of a new accent, the taking on of a new name, the invention of one or several new histories that might get one a ration card, or a postponed eviction notice. The squat grows incrementally, in Rio de Janeiro, in Delhi, in Baghdad, creating a shadow global republic of not-quite citizens, with not-yet passports, and not-there addresses.



SEATTLE



MEXICO CITY



NEW YORK



MOGADISHU



BAGHDAD



GROZNY



SAO PAULO



BUENOS AIRES



DAKAR



KABUL



KARACHI



DELHI



LAGOS



LIVERPOOL



BRUSSELS



HANOI



JAKARTA



BANGKOK



AMSTERDAM



JOHANNESBURG



RAMALLAH



BEIJING

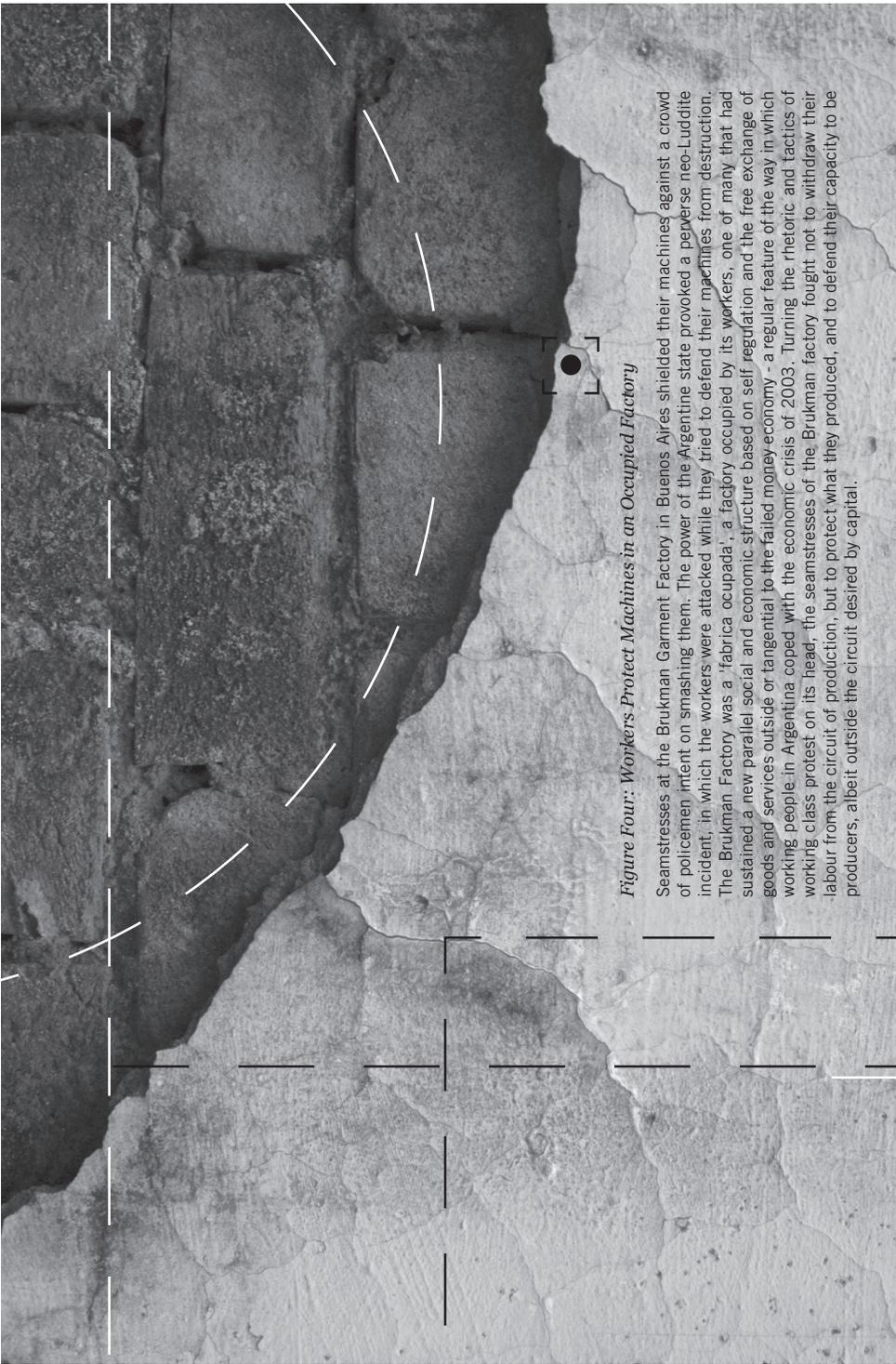


TOKYO



SYDNEY





**Figure Four: Workers Protect Machines in an Occupied Factory**  
 Seamstresses at the Brukman Garment Factory in Buenos Aires shielded their machines against a crowd of policemen intent on smashing them. The power of the Argentine state provoked a perverse neo-Luddite incident: in which the workers were attacked while they tried to defend their machines from destruction. The Brukman Factory was a 'fabrica ocupada', a factory occupied by its workers, one of many that had sustained a new parallel social and economic structure based on self regulation and the free exchange of goods and services outside or tangential to the failed money-economy - a regular feature of the way in which working people in Argentina coped with the economic crisis of 2003. Turning the rhetoric and tactics of labour class protest on its head: the seamstresses of the Brukman factory fought not to withdraw their labour from the circuit of production, but to protect what they produced, and to defend their capacity to be producers, albeit outside the circuit desired by capital.



**Figure Three: The Electronic Pirate burns a CD**

A fifteen square-yard shack in a working-class suburb of northeast Delhi is a hub of the global entertainment industry. Here, a few assembled computers, a knock-down Korean CD writer, and some Chinese pirated software in the hands of a few formerly unemployed, or unemployable young people turned media entrepreneurs, transform the latest Hollywood, or Bollywood blockbuster into the stuff that you can watch in a tea shop on your way to work. Here, the media meets its extended public. It dies a quick death as one high-end commodity form, and is resurrected as another. And then, like the Holy Spirit, does not charge an exorbitant fee to deliver a little grace unto those who seek its fleeting favours. Electronic piracy is the flow of energy between chained product and liberated pixel that makes for a new communion, a samizdat of the song and dance spectacular.



## FLEXIBLE COLONISATION

Marina Grzinic

- + The following paper discusses processes of *de-realisation*, *overidentification*, *incarnation(s)* and identity, in connection with flexible accumulation strategies of capitalism and the re- or de-territorialisation of capital.

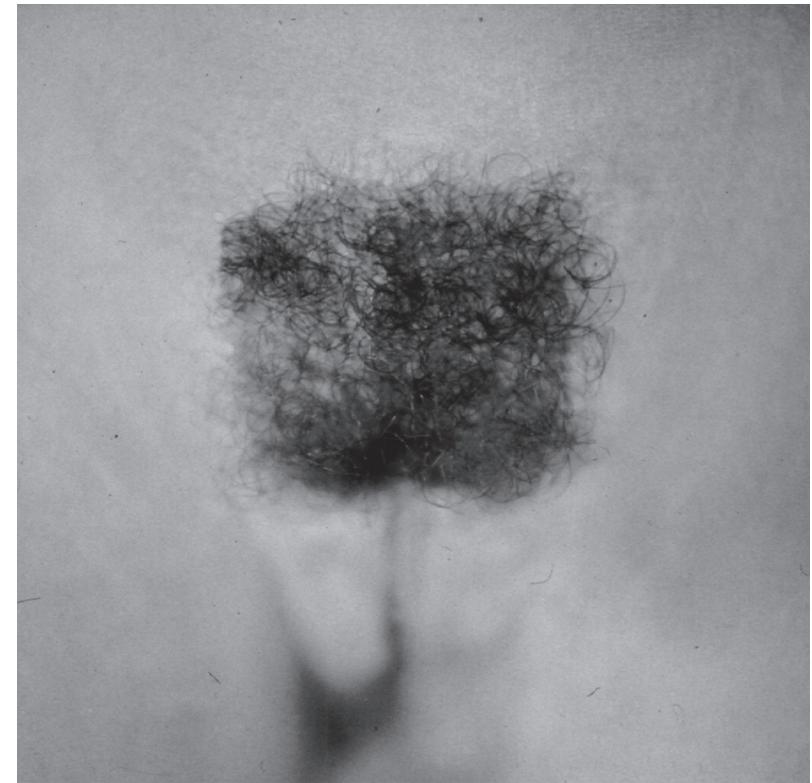
### **De-realisation, overidentification, incarnation(s)**

The true horror today is not horrifyingly violent projects in the arts, as they function, paradoxically, as a protective shield that is fantasised as such, protecting us from the true horror - the horror of the abstract positioning of East and West, North and South, art and economy, state terrorism and activism. The psychotic generating experience in itself is that this abstract collaboration functions as a protective shield (that protects in the end only the obscenely visible art institutions and the power art structures in themselves) and erases all traces of difference, activism, positioning, etc. The art institution defence against the true threat is actually to stage a bloody, aggressive, destructive threat in order to protect the abstract, sanitised situation. This is the sign demonstrating the absolute inconsistency of the fantasmatic support and not only the inconsistency of reality in itself. Instead of the multiple reality talk, as who else but Slavoj Žižek would say, one should thus insist on a different aspect - on the fact that the fantasmatic support of reality, of the art structures and their mechanisms, is in itself multiple and inconsistent.

One possible way of understanding this new situation is that the effect of

de-realisation is an effect of juxtaposing reality and its fantasmatic supplement face to face: to parallel one near the other. The idea is to put together the aseptic, quotidian social reality, life itself, and parallel it with its fantasmatic supplement. Several projects can be listed that use, in a very specific way, this key concept of de-realisation and de-psychologisation of reality and of art (although we should be aware that abstract positioning insists on the psychological moment and on the psychology of the individual artist). A similar strategy was displayed by the Russian Ilya Kabakov, in one of his projects in 2000.<sup>1</sup> He displayed in the exhibition space a reconstruction of a kitchen that was common to the proletariat in socialist times, when Russia was known as the Soviet Union, and moreover through the window of this reconstructed kitchen, it was possible to watch delirious film sequences from the golden Soviet time; films that were produced to give totally splendid communist future visions, with smiling faces, and people eager to work and to fight. It does not matter if real life in itself was an absolutely horrific vacuum, that the kitchen was shared by multiple families with far fewer potatoes for the soup, what was more important was this fantasmatic supplement of life that was parallel to the inconsistent and miserable reality. And it was precisely this moment that was shared and presented in the exhibition space: Kabakov displayed the simple and poor Soviet kitchen with its fantasmatic counterpart, through films and visual ideology. With such a procedure that allows us to externalise our innermost fantasies in all their inconsistency, the artistic practice stages a unique possibility to act out the fantasmatic support of our existence.

A photograph was taken with the title *Tanja Ostojic: Black Square on White /square/,* on which the black pubic hairs of the Belgrade artist and performer Tanja Ostojic, are styled in the form of a 'Malevich' square, and organised in a composition with her /white skin/ Mound of Venus. The Malevich modelled *suprematist pubic entrance*, i.e., the 'black square on white square', was seen during the Venice Biennale **only** by Harald Szeemann, the director of the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, in order to declare that this hidden Malevich, 'in-between her legs' was one of the many official art works of the Biennale in 2001. Meanwhile



during the opening days of the Biennale, Ostojic elegantly dressed, acted as the Angel/Escort (both terms were used by her) of Mr. Szeemann, publicly exhibiting herself near him, while the artwork, the pubic Malevich stayed discretely hidden, and as a first hand witness, I can state, absolutely not disturbed.

Some feminists were furious that she exposed her beautifully shaped body as an object, as they thought, perhaps, that she could escape in the near future being an object of transaction within the corrupted art market, the art institutions and the tyrannical vampire figures that run the ART edifice. Contrary to such a legitimate, but traditional way of understanding an Ostojic happening, the photo and the whole story, as a perverted self-instrumentalisation that relates to

some repressed trauma(s) between visibility and invisibility and object-subject relations, I want to develop two alternative approaches to grasp as precisely as possible this exceptionally powerful work.

The first one is *the authentic act of traversing the fantasy*, the other is *incarnations*; both come from the psychoanalytic heritage, and last but not least, as always, from my re-appropriation of Žižekian thought (1999, 2000). The black *pubic square* has nevertheless an additional, powerful connection to another square, precisely to *Hitler's moustache*, implying a certain process of fasciation in post-modern art, life and the body of the artist in present times.

Power reproduces itself only through some form of self-distance, by relying on the obscene disavowed fantasy rules and practices that are in conflict with its publicly visible installed norms. The obscene edifice of the Institution of Art is emphatically and pathologically conditioned by the disavowed subject's libidinal investments; the subjects are held by power through forms of fantasmatic eroticisation over them. The simply critical avant-garde assertion of the truth of the obscene art power edifice, that is, together with all its gallery and museum institutions, definitely vulgar, cold, manipulative and almost deprived of any aura, is not enough. Or, to stage the critic against the art edifice in the manner of a bloody, aggressive, destructive event is not enough either. The art power edifice is today already staging such bloody events by itself, in order to protect the abstract, sanitised situation it is publicly empowering!

One of the possible strategies is the Žižekian *overidentification* with the power edifice. Acting precisely in a way to overtly stage the fantasmatic scenario that is discussed, incited, and implied, but not made public. That means, if the art power edifice is relying on obscenity and promiscuity, and, if this is what the whole story about art and its power is, then the proposed process of *overidentification* will exactly over-display this in the public realm. Even more, such an act of overidentification performed publicly is, according to Lacan via Žižek, *an act of traversing the fundamental fantasy*, that radically puts

under question our most inherent submission to the power art edifice. Ostojic performed exactly such an act. An authentic act, according to Žižek, disrupts the underlying fantasy, attacking it from the point of a social symptom. The *act of traversing the fundamental fantasy* was used as a bravado strategy in the public appearance of the music group Laibach in the 1980s in Ljubljana as well. Insisting on literal repetition, the group succeeded in overtly staging the hidden fantasmatic scenario of the socialist totalitarian ritual.

It is important to distinguish precisely between an authentic act of traversing the fundamental fantasy from an inauthentic one, that even more obfuscates the invisible traces of emptiness, of the void around which all things gravitate. One palpable political consequence of this notion of the authentic act, insists Žižek, is that in each concrete constellation there is one touchy nodal point of contention which decides where one truly stands. In Laibach, from my point of view, this is undoubtedly the deep relation and rooted position of Laibach's music within the industrial music movement of the 1980s, the most radical and avant-garde rock 'n' roll invention; this is the contention point of absolute Laibach radicality and not, as it would be possible to wrongly understand, a relation beyond the repetition of the totalitarian populist ritual, with any popular-populist music movement - which would have resulted in an absolute double obfuscation of the traces of the void around which the socialist totalitarian system rotated.

In the case of Tanja Ostojic, it is precisely the pubic Malevich under the stylish gowns, the black square, so to speak, embodied on the topological place, and not some kind of 'wallpaper, poster Malevich'. In between her legs the real/impossible kernel of the art power machine received the only possible appearance in flesh and blood. The so-called touchy nodal point of contention in art today, is the cannibalistic attitude of the art capitalist power edifice that displaced and **abstracted** everything and everybody only for the sake of its proper survival. Malevich stands at the beginning of an art history edifice that completely evacuated its conditions of (im)possibility. And if we are to re-articulate the way this real/impossible kernel is to emerge today in the field of representation, then

it is possible only, as per Žižek, *as a tropological, and I will add, topological incarnation(s)*. What else is Ostojic's *Black Square on White* than a tropological incarnation on a topological place! A fleshy (in -carne) embodiment of the total evacuation of the condition of the (im)possibility of the capitalistic edifice of modern art.

Finally, was it not something similar that took place in New York on September 11, 2001? We witnessed precisely this radical de-realisation and de-psychologisation of the American reality that shocked not only the USA, but most of the world that could watch what was going on in New York, in real time so to speak, due to the television video signal. In the explosion of the WTC towers, New York citizens could clearly see the aseptic, quotidian social reality, life itself, in direct parallel with its fantasmatic supplement - Hollywood film scenarios - performed this time in reality. And although all were performed in real time, as was most CNN programming that day, nevertheless it seemed that the tremendous fear, shock and desperation were all covered within an almost virtual dimension. What happened in that moment was that we found ourselves in an almost virtual position. How can we define this situation as virtual? The virtual environment occurs cinematically, as a kind of reversal of face-to-face intersubjectivity; the subject in virtual reality sees her/his shadowy double, which emerges from behind her/him as a kind of sublime protuberance. In the virtual environment, what we are seeing is the concentration of the field and counter-field within the same frame. And this is exactly what occurred in that very moment of radical de-realisation and de-psychologisation of the American reality, that put face-to-face (in a direct parallel) the aseptic, quotidian social reality with its fantasmatic supplement. It was as if the counter-field (Hollywood) was mirrored back into the reality field itself. The result is not solely a desperate loss of innocent human beings, but what will have even more tragic consequences: the absolute deprivation of the Americans of self-identity. What is at stake in virtual reality is the temporal loss of the subject's symbolic identity. S/he is forced to assume that s/he is not what s/he thought her/himself to be, but somebody-something else. And this is also why the mass media, especially CNN, are now producing the

war against the Muslim world and all the others who are not 'the civilised First World', as what is at stake here is the process of trying to cover this absolute 'blow up' of the US self-identity that was until now grounded in absolute power and control.

### **Identity via re-distribution of capital**

It should be obvious that my view of location and identity through theory, which is supposedly general, is actually rooted in a very situated, or rather, located theory. I will put situated theory parallel to situated knowledge, a term paradigmatically coined by Donna Haraway (1997: 15 & 314). It is not about knowledge produced in different locations or by different agents, which in the time of globalisation somehow works on the line of fairly equal positions of dissemination of their theoretical and critical work, as a kind of bona fide relativism. Quite the contrary: to think about located/situated theory is to think about theory that is open to critical investment and, moreover, is never an innocent practice.

The term 'located', according to Katie King (1994), is not equivalent to local, though it can be appropriately partial, just as global does not always mean general or universal. What I want to say is that with local/located/location we can produce a very locally-based activity that can be a politically powerful point of a universal action. I can, for example, state that the local Ljubljana subculture or underground movement of the 1980s is intrinsically connected with a much wider formation, a global activist formation; or on a more 'universal' level I could argue that the local transsexual St. Petersburg's movement can be seen through a multi-layered global intersexuality formation.<sup>2</sup> Located means, above all, distributed and layered, and it is quintessential for theoretical (philosophical, feminist and cultural studies) investigations of identity.

In our times, identity is intrinsically connected with the most inherent processes of capital. It is important to identify that contemporary global capitalism with its inherent de- or re- territorialisation processes, creates conditions for the proliferation of new multiple identities. This production of fluid hybrid

identities results in an inherent internal mark that is the failure of identity, identity perceived in its absolute incompleteness. In fact, no social movement can nowadays assume to be an open-ended, democratic political project without taking into consideration and operationalising the failure of identity, as well as the negativity, directly at the heart of identity (Butler *et al.* 2000: 2-4).

In which way is the process of de- or re-territorialisation of capitalism connected with the politics of identity? What is one of the basic laws of capital? To acquire new territories, over and over again. The purpose of capital is to achieve the absolute limit or to exceed the very idea of limits, always transforming into, or rather behaving as a cannibal, devouring, internalising all that was before. Capitalism has always been a system of internal, correlative, contingent limits, of limits that constantly move and reproduce themselves on a broader scale. It is possible to see the scenario of postmodernism breaking with modernism in the line of capitalism that inverts all perimeters and limits to internal limits. Western national modernism and third world 'modernism' both became the central part of capitalist territory, not as its bastard products, but as an inherently internal bastion project that was transformed, swallowed and spat out as a territory for future art capitalisation. The Western world achieves its goal by creating new movements and styles, simultaneously reproducing and widening the limits of the market. Postmodernism is the aesthetics of the colonisation of previous styles, the occupation with its own history transforming it in internal, correlative, contingent limits. Frederic Jameson's periodisation, which defined postmodernism as the cultural dominant of multinational or consumer capitalism (modernism as a cultural logic of monopolistic or imperialistic capitalism, and realism as the cultural logic of classic capitalism), is also an **index** of a progressive internal cannibalisation, establishing a process of constant de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation.

The history of capitalism is not limited to one original accumulation. When capital started reaching the limits of accumulation within the nation state, where there was suddenly hardly anyone left to be expropriated any more, the

process of original accumulation started again at the beginning (Steyerl 2001: 136-143). Capital was forced to reproduce itself again and again, and this process of constant repetition and reproduction moved the notion of territory activating new sectors of production, distribution and exchange. De-territorialisation is not a process of erasing territories, but first and foremost it is a process of re-territorialisation: constant cannibalisation of old and constant re-invention of new ones. David Harvey elaborated the theory of the flexible accumulation of global capitalism, becoming 'the one' after the original accumulation, to describe the emergence of new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological and organisational innovation (1989: 147). Biotechnology and genetic engineering are the trademarks in such a framework, whereas the Internet provides re-territorialisation in its new address; 'sold out,' 'broke down', but always look for us at '<http://www...>' is the new re-direction of desires, facts and bodies in the global world.

The Internet is the purest sign of this process of flexible accumulation. It started as a territory without borders, without restriction; but today formal legislative and economic regulations transform the Internet into a new territory with old mechanisms of control, distribution of power and ways of accessing it, colonising, controlling it daily, by computer corporations, multinational banking systems and investigative federal agencies. One can say that what was secretly capitalised in the still very near past is made visible with such processes on the Internet now. During the first phase of capitalism, the time of its realistic doctrine of colonial and imperialist ventures with the goal of exploiting and expropriating space, the physical space, meaning land and geography, was at stake. But today it is not about territories in the classical geographical sense any more. Everything and everybody can be transformed into a new territory and become part of the re-territorialisation process.

If we are ready to take an even more profound look at the paradigm proposed by the new historical formation, as Michael Hardt and Toni Negri perceive the

*Empire* (2000), we are in a situation where instead of dealing with the triadic form of the national state- imperialism-modernity (where imperialism was an extension of the sovereign power of the nation states in Europe, beyond their borders), we have to take into consideration the duality between the Empire and postmodernity. This new historical formation, insist Hardt and Negri, with reference to Foucault (taking his ideas on the passage of the society of punishment to the society of control) and especially to Deleuze and Guattari (taking their view of biopolitics as the production of social beings), shows a high level of effective mobility of its power techniques and paradoxical coherency of its procedures of social control. In short, the Empire is not perceived only through economical moments, but even more through institutional and organisational paradigms. The logic that moves this new formation of power is, according to Hardt and Negri, functional much more than mathematical, more rhizomatic than being simply inductive or deductive. This flexibility allows the 'imperial machine' to function for certain in a horizontal way as a systematic structure, and as well as hierarchically, as a regime of 'the production of identity and the difference of homogenisation' and of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Accordingly, capital moves from the physical space to a virtual and 'spiritual' one. Everything and everybody can fit the need to be a new territory. The transference, the transposition, the colonisation is very precise. In establishing new territories, the borders are moved up and down and enlarged. It all depends how big the need is for fresh blood, genuine identities, hybrid states of mind and virtual fluids.

A paradigmatically fabricated case in the town is the recently produced film from the Hollywood entertainment machine: *Lara Croft - Tomb Raider*. It is worth discussing this film, as it introduces new elements in the process of re-territorialisation. It presents the newly capitalised sector of physical and spiritual data transformed in a territory of flexible capital. The plot of this feature appears very simple to someone who will not go to the movie or make an effort to see the film elsewhere. A fleshy upper class woman named Lara Croft mixes the roles of James Bond, Spielberg's Harrison Ford adventure man, Mummy's best

girlfriend and so on, fighting and killing in order to save the world (you expected something else?), so as not to end up with eternal evil.

Each border is over-passed, trans-passed, eradicated or cannibalised. As it was stated by Hardt and Negri, the new formation is a product of the radical transformation that reveals the immediate relation between power and subjectivity, which allows the new emperor a scale of domination that enters the deepest strata of the biopolitical world. It is a process of installing controlling devices, organisational mood, intellectual models and a perception habitat that attacks the deepest strata of consciousness, the bodies of the population, and it is at the same time extended through the inequality of social relations. According to Hardt and Negri, this process is intrinsically connected with the judicial institutional order,<sup>3</sup> which is perceived as the process of a possible instantaneous validity of the constitution of the way the state acts, its organisation and mobility: from civil war to a police operation.

Lara Croft represents precisely such an intersection, where hypercapitalistic market entertainment apparatuses meet the flexible accumulation strategies promising an eternal reproductive freedom. I am interested in creatures like Alien,<sup>4</sup> Lara Croft and monsters,<sup>5</sup> as all of them display identity reproduction, genetic engineering and technoscience so painfully naturally. Lara Croft is almost like an old, strategically well re-designed colonial weapon for identity politics, which will transform, exploit and expropriate the whole system of female yearnings and the power structure of science fiction images. Lara Croft is the newly established little engine in the process of re-territorialisation, showing exactly what kinds of bodies and what forms of alliances called identity relationships are appropriate at the start of the new millennium and at whose cost, and to whose benefit (Haraway 1997: 292). That she is a white, upper class lady is equally important. But beware! The new domination does not consist of the establishment of a hierarchy simply based on cultural differences, but of the evacuation of histories of domination and resistance through technological reproduction.

From now on, women in blockbuster cinematic adventures will be subjected to the paternal male capital rules. This is the new millennium deal, newly invested and capitalised. The rules are clear: killing, beating and fighting like our male pals. This is the way women can join the club. The only thing to do is to make their brains invisible. That thick worm-like structure, namely the brain, which was engaged critically in some other productions, is gone. It is not necessary to think any more, just to act. In order to join the club of constant re-territorialisation it is important to repeat the same rules. Lara Croft reproduces the capitalist mode of an entertainment machine using the same violent methods of massacre as her male pals, in the same way they used to expropriate and to conquer all the others in the past, including women. The result is uniform, without any change, simply the reproduction of the pattern of dominance and the recurring ideological stories of the good and the bad guys - no, sorry, women.

The story of the woman cloned to be as good as her male partner or even better is a recreation in neo-imperialist and colonialist ventures in the moving image territory and in the representation and colonisation of bodies. The white woman in such a context, coming from the US or the West is a tool for capital to produce clones of itself and its ritualistic imaginary pattern, in such a way becoming re-born (it does not matter if it is with a fault) over and over again. And not to mention re-territorialisation, which is going on only in places where it has not been before, and cloning itself in places where it is not, as Steyerl emphasised in the already quoted essay (2000: 142). Furthermore, she claimed: the bourgeois Utopia is literally created by the destruction and devastation of localities and of their transformations into non-sites, by all kinds of weapons, engines and bodily modifications. Hardt and Negri's story about the Empire is similar: it is in and out, and at the same time it seems centralised, although it is without a centre; the Empire is 'everywhere and no-where', it is centralised and at the same time 'u-topic', which means it is a non-space! Hardt and Negri propose a transformation of the productive processes into 'cognitive turn'. That means that dominant processes of production give a primacy to communication, and co-operation, whereas biopolitical production replaced production activity. The

focus is on the production and reproduction of life in itself. The production of the surplus by workers in industry and fabric, is today replaced by an increasing immaterial intellectual power labour, based on communication, which gives exploitation an immediate social dimension while introducing labour-work within all social elements. Human contacts and interactions and intellectual work - the 'accumulation of conscience, technology and skills' not only turn out to be a fundamental productive force, but are one of the most influential industries of the production of theory, interpretations and fields of intellectual power.

The question is not if women are intelligent enough to kill, but if it is necessary for them (us) to be localised as a non-site (Hardt and Negri's 'non-space') in order to obtain physical and epistemological visibility, without identity, history, context. In the past women were invisible, but with a hysterical identity.<sup>6</sup> In short, identity is a relationship, not a preformed category of being or a possession that one can have. The effect of a missing analysis is to treat identity as a preformed category, just being present at or absent from the scene of action. On the contrary, identity is always constituted within several practices and technologies. As Karen Barad has argued (in Haraway 1997), identity is always formed in intra-action, in a close system of stratified relationships, the part of reconfigurations of knowledge and practices that constitute contemporary philosophy, art, cultural activism and theoretical analysis.

5

**NOTES:**

1. Ilya Kabakov's project was presented as part of *L'Autre Moitié de l'Europe* (The Other Part of Europe), National Gallery Jeu de Paum, Paris in 2000.
2. For Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, the intersexual body 'is a paradigm for an alternative concept of the sexed human, a paradigm which allows people to reconsider rigid ideas about the masculine and the feminine and what has been traditionally theorized as "sexual difference." Actually an intersexual body does not possess both sexes, but is in-between sexes. What we can learn from the intersexual body is the possibility to assume a mobile and unfixed gender position. We propose the intersexual body as a virtual sexual identity' (Klonaris & Thomadaki 2000).
3. See Marina Grzinic (2001) 'Hysteria: Physical Presence, Juridical Absence, and Aids: Physical Absence, Juridical Presence' in, Grzinic, *Fiction Reconstructed*, Vienna: edition selene and Springerin.
4. See Marina Grzinic, 'Who are the Mothers of the Monsters?' essay re-published in the new reading room of the Old Boys Network <<http://www.obn.org/generator/>>.
5. Several of my papers deal with this topic, for example *on Translocation*, March-June 1999, Springerin Vienna.
6. See Marina Grzinic (2001) 'Hysteria: Physical Presence, Juridical Absence, and Aids: Physical Absence, Juridical Presence', in Grzinic, *Fiction Reconstructed*, Vienna: edition selene and Springerin.

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# LOWTECH MUSIC FOR HIGHTECH PEOPLE\*

## Gameboyzz Orchestra



**Press START**

## Level 1 &gt; Score 0

Our generation has been dealing with computers since childhood. We have witnessed an evolution of 8 bit computers into 32 bit ones. Computer technology has grown with us. We would play computer games in our free time.

## Level 2 &gt; Score 67

One of the factors in the creation of the *Gameboyzz Orchestra Project* was irony aimed at the contemporary electronic scene, where musicians compete with technological progress - better and better hardware, more and more complex software. We decided to make a decisive move, and impose on ourselves some restrictions through creating sound with use of the GameBoy console.

## Level 3 &gt; Score 174

From the very beginning of working on the *Gameboyzz Orchestra Project* we have been trying to generate our own sound. Of course we deal with pastiche and appropriation, such as samples from games, but this is not our main aim. On the contrary, our aim is to create living sound, improvisation and game-play. Nostalgia connected with old games only gave us initial direction, and indicated the choice of medium for sound creation. Of course we are not orthodox. We are also active in other music projects exploring different fields of electronic music.

## Level 4 &gt; Score 251

We use elements from archives and current pop culture



that, in relation to the peculiar choreography of our concerts in which we do not move much at all, creates a kind of anti-performance that makes comment on quasi avant-garde attempts to place electronic music on the stage in contrast to the spectacular concerts of pop stars. We are also inspired by the aesthetic of 8 bit computers and old school games. The kitsch setting of our performances is purposeful, however it would be a mistake to perceive it in terms of any ideology.

## Level 5 &gt; Score 287

From a musician's point of view the GameBoy device is a simple analogue synthesiser, with a raw and at the same time interesting retro sound. While connected with suitable software it can be used as a drum machine or groovebox. The console's interface is rather limited with only a few buttons, so the sound structures must be simple too. This is also the reason for having 6 players - more players make the sound environment more complex. In the context of music, the untypical interface of the GameBoy console helps us achieve intriguing results.

## Level 6 &gt; Your score 367

The *Gameboyzz Orchestra Project* is an experimental audio-visual project, based on the use of the GameBoy console as a music instrument. The main assumption of the project's authors is to create a new sound space based on the tones generated live from the console during the performance.

**GAME OVER**





5

**NOTES:**

*image credits: Stefanie Pluter & Julia von Vietinghof (first page); Malgorzata Kujda (double page spread).*

\* *The Gamebozzz Orchestra Project* utilises the latest technologies along with retrograde ones used by musicians associated with the *Micromusic Society*, whose slogan is 'lowtech music for hightech people'.





## HOMEWORK: THE EXTENSION OF THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

Mirko Tobias Schäfer

- + One basic assumption of cultural production in the digital age has to be that every product using computer technology is open to modification. If an electronic consumer product is released to the market, users will find ways to adapt this product to suit their needs or find new uses for the product. Game consoles often get cracked because the kids want to play copied games, just as DVD players get cracked because customers want to play every region code on their product. But the Nintendo Gameboy was hacked to turn it into a music editor, so it can be used as a DJ tool. There are several enthusiasts producing Gameboy music, such as the Gameboyzz Orchestra<sup>1</sup> from Poland and the Vienna Gameboy Music Club.<sup>1</sup> The robotic vacuum cleaner Roomba has attracted the attention of several users, because it offers the possibility for experimenting with pricey robot technology and the iPod was hacked for porting Linux on it.<sup>2</sup> Competent users are able to change a released product or even develop an alternative one. Companies will in return use the ideas of users and integrate their modifications into the products. The use of software is therefore not that different from changing or developing products. The process of reading and writing of software requires the same tools and causes no extra costs. The following examples illustrate that this practice is common in several user communities.

### **Xbox Linux**

The Microsoft Xbox is more than just a game console. Equipped with a hard drive, a stripped down version of Windows 2000 and a processor, an Xbox is actually

a personal computer. Microsoft restricted the possibilities of the product in such a way that it is only useable as a game console according to Microsoft's product definition. The Xbox Linux Project is a group of programmers and hackers who decided to open the box and turn it into a universal Turing Machine which could execute a personal computer's usual tasks. Project maintainer Michael Steil, an informatics student from Germany, says that the group members' main motivation is a competitive interest in hacking the Xbox and running Linux on it. Several members of the project were not into gaming at all, but rather into the hands-on work of making a black box compatible with Linux and opening it up for extended usage.

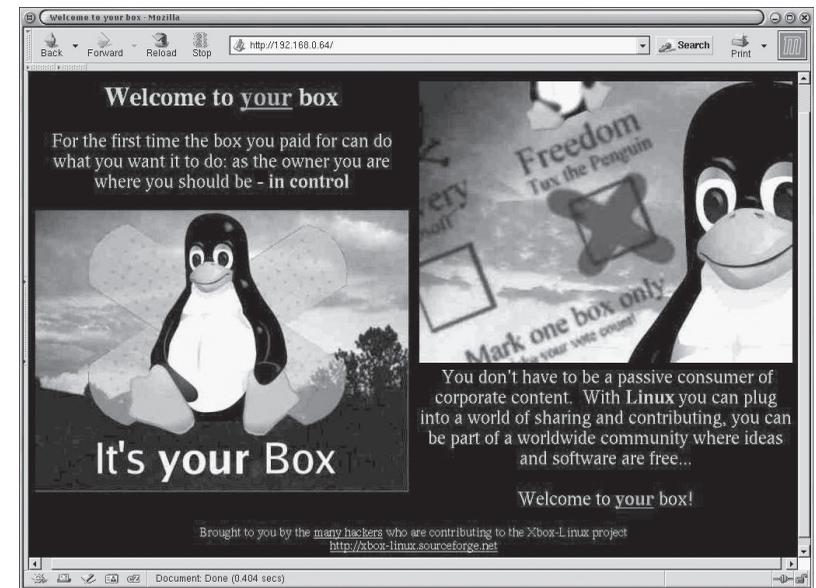
The software for the modified Xbox was developed mainly by six people who received support from various interested parties. The organisation of the project was maintained via the Internet, where the project's website formed the central platform and meetings in the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) which allowed discussions and project planning among the members. To modify the Xbox, a so-called 'mod chip' was necessary to disable the Microsoft-only hardware. Such modified chips are also in use for running DVDs or copied games on a game console. The aim of the Xbox project was to find a way to run Linux without requiring installation of a modchip. The plan for hacking the box without using a modchip became a competition, with a €100.000 award donated by an anonymous person. It turned out that this person was Michael Robertson, former mp3.com founder and CEO and Lindows founder and CEO. In March 2003 the hacker Habibi\_xbox won the competition by knocking out the box by causing a buffer overflow. After disabling the Microsoft software it was possible to execute any code (Becker 2003).

The Xbox Linux project website states:

'The Xbox is a legacy-free PC by Microsoft that consists of an Intel Celeron 733 MHz CPU, 64 MB of RAM, a 8/10 GB hard disk, a DVD drive and 10/100 Ethernet. As on every PC, you can run Linux on it. An Xbox with Linux can be a full desktop computer with mouse and keyboard, a web/email box connected to

TV, a server or router or a node in a cluster.'<sup>3</sup> A well-written step-by-step guide is helping new users to improve their product, and for those who do not feel able to follow the instructions a service is offered by project members to modify the consoles for free.

The discursive labour of product modification is interesting. As well as the meaningful use of technology that contributes to the formation of communities and the generation of meaning for their participants, we can recognise an ideological contribution to the discourse on technology in the graphic representation of the Xbox Linux Project. The welcome slide of the Xbox Linux software states: 'Welcome to *your* box. For the first time the box you paid for can do what you want it to do: as the owner you are where you should be - in control', emphasising authorship as a natural aspect of ownership. In the next sentence on the welcome slide the developers refer to the symbolic capital of Linux, stating that with Linux the user will plug 'into a world of sharing and contributing can be part of a worldwide community where ideas and software are free'.



Screenshot Xbox Linux <<http://www.xbox-linux.org/Screenshots>>

### Aibohack

When Sony introduced the robot dog AIBO in 1999 there was no doubt that several artificial intelligence enthusiasts would start to play around with this sophisticated gadget. The AIBO was equipped with sensors, a camera, a memory stick, 16 MB RAM and a 32 bit processor, and able to learn in a limited way. The owner of the product is required to take care of the electronic pet as if it were a Tamagotchi. Everything about the dog should fit to the family friendly image the product definition had defined. There were even claims that the dog was unable to raise its head for more than 20° because Sony wanted to avoid up skirt camera views (Röttgers 2001).

One of the first who wanted to expand the limited possibilities of the pricey toy was the hacker Aibopet, who purchased one of the first AIBOs. He spent almost a year hacking the software and developing his first modifications. Aibopet offered these programs on his website Aibohack.com free to download. Thanks to Aibopet's work it became possible to let AIBO dance, to imitate the robot Bender from the popular TV-series *Futurama* and to program it with a simple editor. A dynamic community emerged around Sony's expensive product, discussing everything concerning AIBO, helping each other to maintain the product, fixing problems and sharing their ideas of the robot technology on user websites, such as Aibo-life.com, Aibosite.com or Aiboworld.co.uk. The hacker Aibopet claims to spend a lot of time providing support to users - a support Sony is unable to offer. The demand for support increases every time Sony releases a new AIBO. One motivation for Aibopet is to help less skilled users to shape their electronic companion the way they like. The modifications Aibopet and other hackers are offering provide the necessary tools to redefine the purchased product and to reclaim cultural freedom as a user.

In October 2001 Sony threatened Aibopet with lawsuits for copyright infringement. Consequently Aibopet closed the download area of Aibohack.com. This caused a very interesting dynamic reaction. Aibopet published Sony's threatening letter on his website and announced the closure of his download

area on several AIBO user websites. Within a day the message was spread and was even discussed on Slashdot.org, the most prestigious platform for news on computer technology and culture.<sup>4</sup> Within a week the mainstream media, such as the *LA Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Wired*, etc., picked up on the story and published articles about angry AIBO users. The *LA Times* article was further distributed through several mailing lists.

User groups were launching online petitions and calling for boycotting Sony products. Mailing lists such as *Nettime* were spreading articles on the subject and discussing the threat to the cultural freedom of users. Sony noticed users reacting as a heterogeneous, dynamic and uncontrollable multitude, expressing their right to define the products they purchased the way they wanted. It became obvious that the user groups were doing a good job in organising support services for the AIBOs by themselves. Sony's management changed its policy and in a visionary decision accepted the collaborative work of user communities. Sony announced the intention to produce an open programming tool kit for the AIBO, expecting that this could meet the expectations of users in programmable gadgets. It seems obvious that user communities are providing serious research and development work. According to Aibopet, Sony integrated several of his modifications into the newer AIBO releases.

Aibohack.com and Xbox Linux Project are only two out of countless examples of the modification of electronic consumer products. Both examples make clear that products in the digital age become more like processes. A ready-to-use product conforming to a supplier's product definition is replaced by a reading/writing process in usage (Lévy 1997: 121-2). Users start to define the product by implementing it in their personal social context and creating a certain form of meaning by the do-it-yourself process of modification and further development. Although this is done by a minority of users, this phenomenon describes a cultural practice which seems common for computer technology and software culture. This technological avant-garde of users can be considered very important in establishing a cultural practice. By trial and error these people deal with the

technology and its potential to open up possibilities for further development and innovation. This 'hands-on-technology' part of the discourse can also be used as an example and proof of the success of the collaborative working processes that the open source movement enthusiastically embraces. Furthermore, the user communities experimenting with software confirm the value of collaborative work, modifications and re-engineering as innovative practice.

### Homework works!

The computer networks and the availability of software, cultural artefacts and production tools extend the cultural industry into the user's living rooms. Footage of code, pictures, text, news, movies and sound are shared, reassembled and used for further productivity. An enormous output of this creativity is available for free and is circulating outside the established production and distribution channels of the content industries. Since production does not require expensive tools and infrastructures and since reproduction and distribution are available almost for free, a whole industry seems to be less and less relevant. The prescribed 'medicinal bath' of the cultural industry can easily be avoided, because of the growing amount of alternative cultural artefacts. The process of cultural production in the digital age leads to a blurring of professional and amateur producers (Jenkins 2002).

To a great extent, content production and software development takes place outside the established industries. This is caused by the decreasing prices of computers and the increasing availability of software. People can easily produce content and far more easily distribute it. Voluntary work as a single person, or as a community, is the main labour force behind cultural production on the Internet. It seems obvious that companies will have trouble to keep up with this production, distributed through a multitude of users and communities, running on low cost technologies and pervasive distribution.

However, two trends become apparent while analysing this form of cultural production. Firstly, big companies (e.g. Disney, Bertelsmann, Microsoft, etc.)

are trying to push restrictive copyright laws which would stifle the production and innovation of community based production, and secondly, companies will try to exploit this cultural reservoir for their own purposes (without sharing the revenues).

The games industry is largely using the communities of gamers as an extended research and development department. Often users devise new game ideas and settings, developing these ideas as playable modifications of released games. In fact, several of the latest publications on the game market were games that were adopted and further developed from user modifications. The popular game series *Battlefield 1942* was enhanced by 'mods' as *Desert Combat* or *Battlefield Vietnam*, transforming the basic idea of a Second World War first person shooter into the setting of Vietnam and Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

Taking the cultural production of users for free or even worse to integrate it into the companies' intellectual property and thereby binding it to restrictive copyright laws could suppress this voluntary labour. The GNU General Public License of the Free Software Foundation is an attempt to avoid such mistreatment.<sup>6</sup> Every product or program licensed under the GPL may be modified and further developed but every derivative coming out it is strictly bound to this license. While the GPL is mainly suitable for software, among several other examples the Creative Commons licenses was developed for describing by-the-time-copyrights for content productions. The Creative Commons, founded by Lawrence Lessig, is a valuable attempt to combine copyright with the culture of copy and paste.<sup>7</sup>

One could argue that the latest developments in the European Parliament (the passing of the controversial directive on restrictive copyrights and software patents), which were profoundly influenced by lobby organisations, require a necessary discussion of the monopolies' influence on culture and democracy. Horkheimer's and Adorno's culture industry perfectly describes a monopolistic, unidirectional organised industry. But since the 1980s valuable cultural/

technological production and distribution also takes place outside these structures. The current situation might be rather described as the forces of monopoly versus society.

The problems arising in the field of copyright and patent law are probably caused by the culture clash between the understanding of cultural production in the industrial age and the one in the digital age. It would be necessary to formulate positions that describe collaborative working processes as a cultural practice that society should accept and defend. The democratic decision process could ask for a leitmotif in technological development that supports open standards, open source software, transparent working processes and a dynamic and powerful public domain as cultural resource.

↵

*An earlier version of this paper was published in Olga Goriunova & Alexei Shulgin (eds.) (2004) 'Read\_Me, Software Art and Cultures', Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.*

#### NOTES:

1. Gameboyzz Orchestra <<http://www.gameboyzz.com>>, and see herein; Vienna Gameboy Music Club <<http://www.gameboymusicclub.org>>.
2. Roomba robotic vacuum cleaner <<http://www.roombacommunity.com/>>; iPod hacked for Linux <<http://ipodlinux.sourceforge.net/>>.
3. Xbox Linux project <[http://www.xbox-linux.org/Main\\_Page](http://www.xbox-linux.org/Main_Page)> (2004).
4. The post on the Sony case at Slashdot.org caused a discussion with over 400 comments <<http://yro.slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=01/10/28/005233&tid=159&tid=17>>.
5. For more information on game mods, see Nieborg (2004) <<http://www.gamespace.nl/content/CommodificationNieborg2004.pdf>>.
6. Free Software Foundation <<http://www.fsf.org>>; GNU General Public License <http://www.fsf.org/licenses/gpl.html>.
7. The Creative Commons Licenses <<http://www.creativecommons.org>> are already in use in the USA, Germany, the Netherlands and Brazil.

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## THE PRESIDENT@WHITEHOUSE.GOV SHOOTER AND ENLIGHTENMENT AS MASS DECEPTION

Margarete Jahrmann

- + A so-called shooter defines an established type of computer game that is based on the process of sighting or detecting and then shooting an object. The project *Nybble-Engine-toolZ*<sup>2</sup> re-engineers such an existing commercial system into a game engine sprinkled with network commands. In general, game engines are operating software for real-time graphical rendering, which takes place in predefined environments, although the way of rendering the image depends on certain actions, events and triggers. Often they are also the basis for a multi-player environment and for a network protocol. In the case of *Nybble-Engine toolZ*, the network consists of on-site players, actors on a remote site and spectators connected to the nybble-engine game server via the Internet. When shifting between these positions participants become 'spect-actors' (active spectators), changing between an interpassive and interactive role; between code-player and code-writer, or a visitor to an installation and an actor in a virtual environment.

Inside the virtual space each actionbot or player's avatar carries a data object instead of a weapon. As these objects represent command lines and processes from the game environment, they also appear as a part of the installation interface, as laser-sintered 'objectile'.<sup>3</sup> In its pure form as code equivalent and as discourse object it is exhibited as a code hardcopy. This freeze frame functions as the art-coded interface to the data-world in the installation. The peer-to-peer software of the installation converts network processes into three-dimensional abstract movies and projects these onto a 180-degree screen, such as experienced



in an interpassive cinematic situation. The network codes and commands are generated with the aid of game engines into audio-visual so-called 'machinima' movies. Simultaneously they are playable command lines in the networked game environment.

The participants in the experiment can, however, also become active in the installation space. At a small control desk they see their individual view of the navigation, which presents a subjective perspective at variance with the server view on the screen. The players use an ordinary game pad to log onto the network of the installation and to enter into the shooter environment, where projectiles of data object(ile)s, action bots as well as other players are flying about. Each time a data object is hit, network processes are triggered; each time a shot is fired with the game-pad, an anti-war email is sent to <president@whitehouse.gov>. Each toolz-email is displayed in real-time as both ASCII text and newly generated visual object. Out of this visually coded environment, text messages are sent. This can also be commands from the running engine itself

to the network. E-mails inside the engine trigger the environment of action-bots (these are software player-robots with a minimal artificial intelligence), although one can also directly log in on the game-server. While moving through the environment, trace routes are started from the game to a number of crucial government servers. Network activities outside the engine are displayed in the game environment in real-time as texts and 3-D objects. By reversing the effects of a specific action, such as jump'n run or shoot, the rules of the game engine are reversed: the unreal tournament becomes a situationist détournement, an inversion: Attack is collaboration, shoot is communication, and playing becomes the editing of code!<sup>4</sup>

As intended contrast to the violent aesthetics of the computer game, the project is based on anti-war e-mails, commissioned with each shot made with the game pad in the installation and the online network. In this way, the toolz are useful for lessons in self-defence, that the citizens of contemporary democratic societies should adopt to be able to resist manipulation and control.

Received: from bbs.thing.net (bbs.thing.net [66.181.183.50])  
□by konsum.net (8.12.8/8.12.8) with ESMTP id h3HBFNiE002562  
□for <automat@konsum.net>; Thu, 17 Apr 2003 13:15:24 +0200  
Received: (from majordomo@localhost)  
□by bbs.thing.net (8.11.6/8.11.6) id h3HDfbr01050  
□for nettime-l-outgoing; Thu, 17 Apr 2003 09:41:37 -0400  
Message-Id: <200304171341.h3HDfbr01050@bbs.thing.net>  
Date: Thu, 17 Apr 2003 02:53:14 -0500  
Subject: Re: <nettime> A venture into hybridisation  
From: human being <human@electronetwork.org>  
To: nettime-l@bbs.thing.net  
Sender: nettime-l-request@bbs.thing.net  
Precedence: bulk  
Reply-To: human being <human@electronetwork.org>  
Status: O

Tracing route to yada.protest.net [216.235.252.206]

1	<10 ms	<10 ms	<10 ms	10.0.0.1
2	<10 ms	<10 ms	<10 ms	10.0.0.1
3	<10 ms	<10 ms	<10 ms	fürzigw.sil.at [62.116.1.233]
4	<10 ms	<10 ms	16 ms	bevivi.vbs.at [194.152.167.194]
5	<10 ms	16 ms	<10 ms	vivibb.vbs.at [62.116.2.65]
6	<10 ms	16 ms	<10 ms	zoll.vbs.at [62.116.2.36]
7	<10 ms	15 ms	<10 ms	80.86.169.129
8	15 ms	16 ms	16 ms	N-1-pos022.de.lambdanet.net [217.71.105.97]
9	16 ms	31 ms	16 ms	F-2-pos110-0.de.lambdanet.net [217.71.105.105]
10	31 ms	31 ms	32 ms	PZU-1-pos100.fr.lambdanet.net [217.71.96.34]
11	47 ms	32 ms	46 ms	iar1-so-2-3-0.Paris.cw.net [208.175.147.1]
12	31 ms	32 ms	31 ms	bcr2.Paris.cw.net [208.172.250.62]
13	109 ms	125 ms	109 ms	dcr1-loopback.NewYork.cw.net [206.24.194.99]
14	110 ms	109 ms	109 ms	agr3-so-0-0-0.NewYork.cw.net [206.24.207.58]
15	109 ms	109 ms	125 ms	acr1-loopback.NewYork.cw.net [206.24.194.61]
16	110 ms	109 ms	109 ms	cable-and-wireless-peering.NewYork.cw.net [206.24.195.150]
17	110 ms	109 ms	109 ms	jfk-core-02.inet.qwest.net [205.171.230.22]
18	109 ms	125 ms	109 ms	jfk-core-01.inet.qwest.net [205.171.230.1]
19	109 ms	109 ms	125 ms	bos-edge-02.inet.qwest.net [205.171.28.14]
20	110 ms	125 ms	125 ms	65.112.16.6
21	109 ms	125 ms	109 ms	65.112.16.6
22	110 ms	125 ms	125 ms	host1.209.113.141.conversent.net [209.113.141.1]
23	109 ms	125 ms	125 ms	216.235.245.246
24	110 ms	125 ms	125 ms	216.235.245.246
25	109 ms	125 ms	125 ms	protest.net [216.235.252.206]

Trace complete.

tehouse.gov 25/05/2003 15:08:44:906

Nybble ActionBot1

Furthermore, the propaganda of consumer games lulls players into accepting ideological conditions, in such a way that the design and story of 'shoot them up' games necessitates the 'war against terrorism'. Here it is especially interesting that the praxis of 'total conversion' (so-called TCs in gamer's lingo) was made popular with a game about terrorism, which can be seen by its content and its representation as a celebration of the political forces of the leading nations. The gameplay is centralised around fighting between terrorists and counter-terrorists. Its goals are disarming bombs or rescuing hostages, and all weaponry is modelled on existing arms - including the design, the specific use, and sound effects. But total conversions of games can also produce a critical position as in the case of *Nybble-Engine-toolZ*.

The *climax* team engaged on the *Nybble-Engine toolZ* consisted of Evolutie, a developer from the V2\_Lab, Rotterdam (from November 2002 until January 2003), the artists Max Moswitzer and Margarete Jahrmann, in exchange with radical structuralist theroeticians and writers such as F.E. Rakuschan and Heiko Idensen. Such a loose group of people might be compared to a thinking school like the Frankfurt School of critical theory - not dedicated to a certain line of thinking, but at this current historical moment applying a counterstrategy against the so-called alientation of labour, to draw parallels to the condition of consumers in an IT society counting on public licensing tools on one side and patents on algorithms on the other side. 'Mods', the modifications of games, and TCs were and are beforehand always made by consumers, 'just for fun' and 'just because we can do it!' Total conversion, coming from a praxis of modification and 'crack' of consumer games, cannot be directly commercialised because of the difficult legal situation between proprietary code and non-proprietary code, because it is just in the middle between affirmation and critique. This is valid for 'software art' or 'game art' in general, but especially for this work, in which it serves as an anchorpoint. In the tradition of the *climax.at* works, open source parts are interwoven into a commercial game engine.

By shooting anti-war emails to <president@whitehouse.gov>, action clearly

expresses a sense of agency that transgresses the defined boundaries of a gaming environment. Other actions include triggering online processes, such as massive pings or traceroutes to crucial government servers. All these actions happen in 'the real world' and not in the 'sim' world of a game. All the outgoing signals are counted and transferred to other servers and this can be seen as an example of a public online demonstration tool. I would call this a 'Real Game'.

5

**NOTES:**

1. The title of this text makes reference to Adorno and Horkheimer's essay 'The Culture Industry', which when extended to include current IT industries, needs to address the production of computer games. Unlike TV news broadcasting, the users of computer games have little difficulty in distinguishing between the creation of real as opposed to illusory worlds in that games are clearly labelled as such.

2. A 'nybble' is the unit of half a byte or four bits and thus the basis of every digital conversion. As the numeric equivalent of the binary code, it exemplifies the internal logic of software, that converts codes and protocols on a server into various representations.

3. With reference to Bernard Cache, Gilles Deleuze defines an objectile as 'a very modern conception of the technological object: it refers neither to the beginnings of the industrial era nor to the idea of the standard that still upheld a semblance of essence and imposed a law of constancy but to our current state of things, where fluctuation of the norm replaces the permanence of a law; where the object assumes a place in a continuum by variation. The object here is manneristic, not essentializing: it becomes an event'.

4. 'Attack is collaboration, shoot is communication, playing is editing code!' This sentence is taken from the <www.climax.at> mission statement.

*'Nybble-Engine-toolz' by Margarete Jahrmann & Max Moswitzer was developed in cooperation with the V2\_lab Rotterdam and first installed at the exhibition 'metadata' at the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival 03, at Showroom MAMA, and the site at the las palmas exhibition hall in Rotterdam <<http://www.climax.at/nybble-engine-toolz/>>.*



## ON WARFARE AND REPRESENTATION

Jordan Crandall

+ [1]

Images of war arrest us. They aim to offer the truth of violence. It is difficult to argue with them, difficult to deny their authenticity. Witness to death and devastation, they seem to cut right through the play of signification. We read them viscerally - as if, with a rush of adrenaline, the body were instinctually reacting to the possibility of its own violation. What do we mean when we deem such an image accurate? What does it mean to believe such an image? Images of the truth of violence have always been intertwined with manoeuvres of deception. The first full-scale attempt to document a war through photography, by the Mathew Brady team at Gettysburg, often involved the relocation of munitions and the repositioning of the dead. The history of war photography is a history of realism and stealth. The image reveals, but it also hides.





[2]

There is a gap between what one does and what one performs. We ‘play for the camera’, constituting ourselves within media of self-identification. We often need to shape the act of being observed to our own advantage, especially during times of conflict. Choosing one’s (potential) image can be an act of combat. This manoeuvring is not limited to those who are represented. It applies to those who orchestrate the framing of the image. Consider an aerial video, shot by the Israeli Defense Forces, of a funeral that occurred during the 2002 siege of the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. The IDF claims that this videotape documents a fake ceremony, staged in order to multiply the number of casualties in Jenin. At which level does this possible deception occur - at the level of institution or camera subject? Each agency plays not to the camera per se, but to their respective audiences and authorities. Each plays to the Law: the juridical paradigms that shape culture and conflict.

[3]



To a large extent, the degree to which we assign truth to an image is dependent upon the degree of our alignment with the ideological system that supports it. However, war representation, like warfare itself, is by its very nature embedded in strategic manoeuvring. It is as if the image itself

were a tensile surface, embedded within a dynamic of detection and deception. The embeddedness of representation was seldom acknowledged during the embedded reporting of the Iraq war. News teams with cameras deployed on the battlefield were meant to give us a sense of unfiltered immediacy. However, they ended up obscuring more than they revealed. They were embedded in an ideological construct that overrode any sense of authentic onsite content. They became munitions in another kind of war.

[4]

Accuracy seems to automatically emerge out of technological development. The logic goes something like this: since technologies of vision give us the ability to see increasingly precise details, they therefore give us a more correct representation of something. Accuracy is to be located in the high-precision technology of visualisation, not in our own perceptual faculties. Visualisation is not about seeing, but about tracking: detecting an object with unprecedented accuracy, pinpointing it precisely in time and space, understanding how it moves, and predicting its future position. One could say that we are witnessing the relocation of the site of accuracy away from the space of perception and into the technologised image itself. It is as if the image network could harbour cognition and authentication within its own confines. One sees



this at work not only in high-tech systems but also in commercial news television. The newscast offers a form of automated deliberation. Combining managed combat information and entertainment, it does the thinking for its viewers.

[5]



A resurgent form of witnessing, preoccupied with the vicissitudes of the fallible human and the logistics of the handheld, leads to a new quality of accuracy. With its sense of unfiltered credibility, streamed video serves as a form of semiotic compensation for a landscape that has been colonized by standardised media formats. One might call it transmission *verité*, where the hidden substrata of the technology are reintroduced as part of the content of the image, and a raw immediacy appears to open up a direct access to the real. The reality of representation is substituted for the representation of reality. That is, 'authenticity' arises less from the authentic representation of reality *per se*, and more from the authenticity of the means by which reality is portrayed. Whether 'unmanned' or 'embedded', we could say that we are witnessing the relocation of vision to a space outside of the body - whether into a network or a networked 'smart image', or into a simulation of newly embodied presence through the scrim of the media construct.

[6]

Battle simulations, news, and interactive games exist within an increasingly unified space. With military-news-entertainment systems, simulations jostle with realities to become the foundation for war. They help combine media spectatorship and combat, viewing and fighting. They have a role in producing the situations that they seem only to anticipate. They deliver images of the very system of conflicts that they help to maintain. Forming a loop between perception, technology, and the pacings of the body (eye, viewfinder, trigger), they help to produce new forms of engagement and subjectivity, attention and differentiation. We locate ourselves to 'this side' of the image, to the safe side, against the enemy from which it protects us. We draw lines in the sand; we say, 'I stand here against you', defining ourselves by that which we oppose. Internal solidarities cohere against external threats. Identity is formed through the conduit of a feared and necessary enemy.



[7]

Some images, by their nature, arouse conflicts as to their very existence. These images should not be seen by anyone, one says. This existent image should not exist. Such images fill us with dread. Yet, they enrapture us with a morbid fascination. Squaring these two impulses is more troubling to



us than we realise. Like the aftermath of a violent car crash, we have to look, yet we don't want to see.

[8]



We are accustomed to being on the winning side of the image. After all, representation arose out of a need to protect us. Photography was driven by the need to remove the human from direct physical contact with the site of experience, placing us on the 'other side' of representation as a shield from reality. It protected us from the vicissitudes and dangers of physical presence and in the process allowed us a form of disembodied presence. An image comes full circle when it reveals the vulnerability of its own bodily and machinic underpinnings. The final video images of the Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana in Baghdad are a case in point. Watching the video, we see a US Army tank approaching Dana and we feel the camera-body tumble to the ground as he is shot by a US soldier, who mistook his camera for a weapon. Both machine and human collapse, the camera resting on an extreme close-up of the pavement, upon which Dana's now inert body lays. The death of the cameraman-as-stand-in reveals the mortality that hovers around the act of representation.

[9]

When we see a violent image, we can be compelled to think, Who took this? Someone was there; someone witnessed this act. Yet, they did nothing to stop it. We are compelled to acknowledge the ethical codes of journalism: the pact that allows the camera to slip into the battlefield as a neutral agent, its negotiated resolve of non-intervention precisely the source of its efficacy and power. Yet perhaps, even by its very presence on the scene, the camera is somehow responsible for the violence that it documents. Somehow, through its introduction, it helps to enact violence. The camera helps to ensure that a violent act will stand for something. It enacts meaning, endowing significance to the isolated incident. The camera transforms life into mise-en-scene, and scripts an awareness of a future audience of witnesses.



[10]

Even though reality and representation can never be reconciled, technologies of vision and representation are driven by the false sense that they could be. We are compelled to locate veracity within the technologised image, yet this line of endeavour is fundamentally a dead end. Like the lead character in Antonioni's *Blow Up*, who repeatedly enlarges his photographs of a suspected crime scene in order to uncover their hidden truths, we are faced with an existential crisis when we are





unable to overcome the referential gap. Reality and representation can never be reconciled. Could one, then, posit the eventual elimination of the need for the image altogether? Since images are only offered up for the benefit of humans, machine-assisted or automated seeing renders imaging superfluous. Perhaps these images are no longer representational in the traditional sense. Rather, they are awkward constructs that attempt to bridge this contradiction.

♻





## THE SPECTACLE: GLOBAL AND PARTICULAR

Adam J. Chmielewski

### + **Third World War**

Albert Einstein is reported to have said that he did not know what the Third World War would look like, but that he knew that the fourth one would be fought with clubs and sticks. It seems that we are now in a much better cognitive situation than Einstein was. By now we already know, or rather, we *should* know, what the Third World War will look like. For it is gradually becoming obvious that its proceedings have continued right in front of our own eyes for some time now. It is also becoming obvious that one cannot go on describing the present state of the world by the leftist or rightist vague mantra that it is a place of the global strife of noble and rational forces with evil and irrational ones. The situation is more serious, and most likely will soon become much more serious than it already is. The seriousness of the situation in which our world has found itself justifies calling it the state of the Third World War.

Before readers burst into laughter at the proclamation of global war by a provincial philosopher, I implore them kindly to consider a number of the following arguments which afford the assertion some plausibility. Even in countries like Poland, for example, a country which was completely instrumentalised into the role of a pawn by American hands and pushed into its inept involvement into the Iraqi war, such assertions do not cause laughter anymore.<sup>1</sup> Nor do they cause much hilarity in other places, and not only in the US.<sup>2</sup> Most certainly they will cause no laughs in Madrid.

### Hegemony nearly complete

One of many signs of a nearly total submission of Western culture to the American hegemony is the widespread acceptance of American intellectual domination. The domination has found its new expression in the fact that, following the official American ideologues, the series of unprecedented bloody assaults on the US in 2001 and on Europe in 2004 is being superficially perceived by most politicians, political commentators and the media as the 'problem of terrorism.' The American reaction to the problem, defined in such a way, was the proclamation of the 'war on terrorism'. The European Union, an increasingly independent and coherent political agent, defines the problem along somewhat similar lines, though in a significantly different manner, as the 'fight against terrorism'.

Such a conceptualisation of the problem is dependent, to a greater or lesser degree, upon the rhetoric of American political and ideological circles. The US administration is not only supported, but seems indeed instigated to its present moralistic unilateralism by certain American intellectuals who succeeded in intellectually hijacking it by means of their ideology of secrecy, hypocritical moralism and militarism. As has been recently revealed, there is a group consisting largely of former pupils of the German-American political philosopher Leo Strauss, who have worked over the past two decades or so to impose their understanding of politics upon the present republican US administration and its supporters.<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of 9/11, their political views have found credibility by the majority of American political and intellectual centres, as well as the American public.

One of the features of the dominant rhetoric is that it tends to reduce the main problem of the present world to 'terrorism', i.e. to the unprecedented attacks on Western countries, aimed at causing atrocious carnage among civilians. The danger involved in the mindless emulation of the 'war-on-terrorism' rhetoric is that through being battered into the heads of the public by the media, effectively it may prevent posing some crucial questions concerning the reasons which

motivate perpetrators of the attacks to their horrifying acts that, as a rule, involve the annihilation of the perpetrators themselves. The political and military actions undertaken by the US and the 'antiterrorist coalition' have been based upon an understanding of the problem that seems to have been bedazzled by the symptoms of the problem and that persistently avoids its causes - lest it turns out that the responsibility for the problem of terrorism is to be co-shared by countries and nations targeted by terror.<sup>4</sup> No wonder, then, that the undertaken antiterrorist action is just as ineffective and as inadequate as the intellectual construction which legitimised it.

### The Resistance

In one of his speeches, in response to the criticism of the US moralist rhetoric, George W. Bush said:

'Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities. Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place. [...] We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name.'<sup>5</sup>

It is rather difficult ideologically to counter the 'antiterrorist' rhetoric, fortified by the moralistically charged concepts of 'the axis of evil', 'the rogue states', 'the decaying states', 'the fallen states', 'terror', and most especially the 'justified', 'pre-emptive action' and the ideology of 'nation-building'. Its appeal and popularity has its sources in the moralistic simplicity which tends to blur differences and makes it easy to brand anyone opposed to American imperialism as a sympathiser of Saddam Hussein or follower of Osama bin Laden. As Cornel West writes: 'instead of Communism as our external foe we have Islamic terrorism. In addition, the prevailing conservative culture has made the Left - progressives and liberals - internal enemies. They are considered out of step with the drumbeat of patriots, who defer to the imperial aims, free-market policies, cultural conservative views, and personal pieties of the Bush administration.' (2004)

There is, however, a growing awareness that the neo-conservative good/evil persistent propaganda poses a danger to the future of the globe no smaller than the dangers from the terrorists themselves. So far it has led to a perception of the US as the true 'rogue state'.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the epithet of the rogue state has been mirrored back at the United States that invented it in the first place, is a good example of a quite familiar effect of one becoming what one wished to destroy.

This rhetoric can and should be challenged; and indeed it does not go unchallenged. The American ideological imperialism, quite properly and dialectically, is being met with some, though still insufficient, resistance. It is being challenged not only by the anti-hegemonic and anti-American extreme Islamic anti-occidentalists, conveniently branded as 'Islamofascists' (Podhoretz 2004), but also, as was shown by the electoral decision of the Spaniards in March 2004, by their enemies as well. There are reasons to believe that American imperialism is in fact a major factor in enabling the countries forming the European Union to define their new European identity.<sup>7</sup> It is becoming obvious that one cannot continue to satisfy oneself with dismissive description of the forces of resistance against 21st century imperialism as 'irrational terrorists', with whom no discussion is possible, or, for that matter, as 'relativist' and 'weak-kneed post-modern Europeans'. If one does so, one will lose the chance of understanding some of the major and important factors determining the global condition in the 21st century.

### Clipping the State

The traditional concept of the state implies that the proper agents of politics are political/territorial units called states. However, ever since the times of Immanuel Kant, or Carl von Clausewitz for that matter, the world has undergone significant transformations. This has resulted in the far-reaching reduction of the space of legitimate action of the state, as far as the internal and external politics are concerned. Indeed, the difference between internal and the external in present-day politics is being increasingly blurred, which is a natural effect of globalisation processes. The prerogatives of the state are continuously being

clipped from below, and sheared from above.

Looking from below, we see that the prerogatives of states, especially in those where liberal civil societies are strong, are increasingly taken over by regional and local governments, non-governmental agencies and organisations, as well as by individuals themselves, who demand ever greater freedom for themselves and ever more effective legal protection of their individual rights and agency. The devolution of the state from above consists in the fact that it is increasingly forced to enter into inter- and supra-state alliances of an economic and political nature. This devolution can be interpreted as a belated, or rather, somewhat belatedly noticed response to the globalisation of the economy; and it is aimed largely at enhancing the global economic processes rather than at the regulation and control of them.

The reductive transformation of the role of the state can best be seen in the military domain. The state has always been forced to forsake, to a greater or lesser degree, its sovereignty as far as military matters are concerned, by way of entering into military alliances. The outbreak of the Third World War makes it obvious that the state has lost nearly all remnants of its sovereignty in this as well as in other regards. Its future course may deprive the state of its sovereignty, irreversibly and irrevocably.

### Who Against Whom?

If it is the case that we are now in the state of the Third World War; and if it is the case that the states in the traditional sense are not the warring parties, having been significantly weakened in their prerogatives and powers, who is fighting it?

According to the officially accepted view, the Western liberal democratic civilisation declared a war after it was attacked by terrorists. The war was declared by a coalition of the states, but it was declared not on another state, but on a group of stateless people united by their hatred of the West. The terrorists are

perceived as 'a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al-Qaeda' who 'hate our freedoms, our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other',<sup>8</sup> overwhelmed by their irrational fundamentalism, who find an incomprehensible and perverse joy in senseless, cruel and aimless destruction and murder of infidels. In order to achieve their murderous aims, they devise sophisticated plots and make prolific use of the technological devices produced by the attacked civilisation itself.

This has some truth in it. But it is obvious that it is not the whole truth. Here is a possible interpretation of the problem that goes slightly deeper into the matter. In a recent paper, Cornel West, echoing sentiments that have gradually gained more sympathy, has written:

'glorification of the market has led to a callous corporate-dominated political economy in which business leaders (their wealth and power) are to be worshipped - even despite the recent scandals - and the most powerful corporations are delegated magical powers of salvation rather than relegated to democratic scrutiny concerning both the ethics of their business practices and their treatment of workers. This largely unexamined and unquestioned dogma [of free-market fundamentalism] that supports the policies of both Democrats and Republicans in the United States - and those of most political parties in other parts of the world - is a major threat to the quality of democratic life and the well-being of most peoples across the globe.' (2004)

The interpretation which follows, a metapolitical one, follows the direction pointed to by West. Thus, one of the warring parties are the forces of global capital which, by their very nature, aim at expansion into areas, the domination of which are seen as a necessary condition of their further development. Their expansion and aggression are now being legitimised by a conglomerate of rightist liberal antidemocratic ideas; an accumulation of the rhetoric and propaganda which nowadays organise, by means of the politics and the media, popular thinking about the interests of those forces, their intentions, and their methods of dealing with the rest of the world.

In interpreting the present situation of global politics we instinctively tend to accept as an obvious fact that the United States, as a 'legal person' and a proper subject of international law, has declared war against terrorism in response to the most successful and most spectacular attack it suffered since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Yet, even if it really were the case from the formal/legal point of view (though the declaration of war, and subsequent aggression on Iraq was illegal from the point of view of international law), the suggested interpretation implies that the US, as a state, has declared the war on terrorism not in its own right, nor in its own name, but in the name and in the interest of a coalition of corporations which have bought this state for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Having bought the state for their almost exclusive use, they run it to further their own private, and not the (republican) common good. They run it for the good of Halliburton, for example, a corporation which soon after the successful US invasion on Iraq signed trade contracts exceeding the sum of 8 billion dollars. The fact that private corporations are well and quite insolently represented in the administration of the US, e.g. by Donald Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney, cannot be thought irrelevant, nor for the sums appearing in particular contracts signed by different companies with the US, nor for the decision to invade Iraq itself: one would not be possible without the other. As many writers suggest, having such a vital interest in war, the powerful partners of the state have subjugated it in order to achieve their aims and instigated military involvement. Thus the state has now become instrumentalised to further particular aims of inscrutable interest groups, which defy and ignore any democratic control and scrutiny.<sup>10</sup>

The increasing instrumentalisation of the state makes it essentially weaker than private corporations. They, in their turn, have become powerful enough that they can gobble, undisturbed, on the enfeebled state. They have become powerful enough that they can afford to buy not only individual bureaucrats, but ministers or even the presidents, as they in fact do,<sup>11</sup> with the aim of increasing their power even further. They can also afford to buy the voting public - by millions, and quite cheaply too. In this particular purchase, the private media

make themselves indispensable. Despite that, voters persist in an illusionary conviction that the current democratic process, in which the media do indeed play an indispensable role, ensures their right, space and the possibility to make their electoral decisions on their own. This illusion is propagated by media moguls who defend themselves from any criticism, by implying that they own free speech for themselves and that it is up to them to decide what counts as free speech and what does not; whereas in their daily business, which is 'targeting the viewers', they do their utmost to thwart any sign of their independent thinking and decision-making. This, of course, is perfectly understandable: if they did not do just that, they would be out of business.

This quite platitudinous remark leads to an equally obvious, though somewhat less frequently noticed one: the media are indeed buying the voting public by zillions, *but they pay for it with the money they got from voters themselves*. For it is no one but voters themselves who pay the media to have someone/something to think for them, and make decisions for them. This fact enables us to draw attention to an important phenomenon, namely one of *voluntary servitude*.<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon is spreading thanks to the democratisation and individualisation of the Western world. The spread of the attitude of voluntary servitude would not be possible, in its turn, had it not been for another, more fundamental phenomenon, described by Robert Pfaller as *interpassivity*.

The simplest way to explain interpassivity is to juxtapose it with the better known phenomenon, that of *interactivity*. The voting public, for example, does not act according to the principle of interactivity, i.e. the individuals do not participate actively in the public sphere that has been opened for them by liberalism and democracy in order to mould the space - and themselves - according to their expectations and desires. Rather, they act according to the principle of interpassivity, i.e. they are paying, hiring or buying other people, institutions, and all sorts of technological devices, to do that for them and instead of them. They do so in order to shirk from independent thinking and from responsibility for their own decisions, and ultimately to rid themselves altogether of them.

This psychological mechanism demonstrates that liberal democratic culture, aimed at empowering and enhancing the agency of individuals, leads to precisely the opposite effect: the individual agency is becoming enfeebled and atrophied by virtue of the very freedom of choice the people are offered within liberal societies, and which they fought for. This is one of many paradoxes which poses a great threat to liberal democratic culture: interpassivity, which was made possible by liberal democratic achievements, now eats away at the culture which gave rise to it.

### **Fighters for Another Cause**

The other party engaged in the Third World War are forces of resistance against the expansion of global capitalism. They consider themselves, more or less self-appointedly, a political representation of social groups and nations that are prone to see themselves as victims of globalisation. Ideological justification of their worldviews, and legitimacy of their actions, has been built in a strict dialectical contrast to liberal democratic ideology. In brief, it is an assemblage of traditionalist, ethnocentric and religious doctrines. Contrary to the predominant perception of them by the rationalist and individualist West, followers of this ideology are not mystic irrationalists stupefied by their religious beliefs. They are rather rational and committed fighters for another, anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-occidental cause.

The ideologies of the parties engaged in conflict described here as the Third World War present a good practical illustration of a theoretical distinction between the concepts of the 'open society' and the 'community'. This distinction seems to be a quite useful instrument in dealing with the plethora of positions formulated in the liberalism/communitarianism debate.<sup>13</sup> The important thing, however, is not so much the contents of these conglomerates or their consistency. After all, even in Western liberal democratic civil societies, only about 10 per cent of voters have something passable for a system of political beliefs that they are capable of defending by something resembling rational arguments. More important is the mode of advocacy of juxtaposed beliefs.

The advocacy of beliefs which motivates the foes of the Western world is in direct contrast to the one accepted in liberal and democratic societies. A good liberal democrat is characterised by a specific, relativistic attitude towards the values s/he holds to be valid, i.e. by the 'tepidness' of their commitment. This is seen in liberal democratic culture as a precondition enabling one to behave tolerantly towards the other.

In opposition to this, the follower of traditionalist, religious and ethnocentric ideology cannot hold their values otherwise but zealously, passionately and unflinchingly, which excludes the toleration of the other. It is not by accident that the name for the intransigent and uncompromising organisation Hamas, which recently lost its leader Sheik Ahmed Jassin, assassinated by the Israeli army, translates as 'zeal'. The mutual intranslatability of moral discourses characteristic of both parties involved in the Third World War, the incommensurability of the values held by them to be valid, and the characteristic difference in the modes of advocacy, are bound to express themselves in a violent conflict between them.

### When Did It Start?

The immortal motto of the film series *The X Files* expresses an important, though vague truth about truth, namely that it is out there. Indeed it is. Despite it being out there in the open, it is usually, however, quite difficult to see.

Least controversially, the outbreak of the Third World War should be placed at the date of September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. were attacked. The 9/11 attacks performed a Gestalt-switch role, enabling everyone to see suddenly that the Third World War is in fact going on.

There are some reasons to believe, however, that it has been waged for quite some time before those attacks. The seeds of the present conflict may have been sown with the creation of the Israeli state in the Middle East in 1948, though, at that time, the conflict was only burgeoning and was overshadowed by the cold

war between the Communist bloc and the Western world. Ever since the first cracks of the Communist façade appeared under the pressure of the winning liberal West over the Communist 'empire of evil' and due to the Soviet empire's 'overstretch' in Afghanistan, the Third World Islamic nations resorted back to their indigenous religious and tribal *Weltanschauung* which pointed them to the obvious present enemy, the Western world. As a result, the incidents of attacks on the Western, mainly American citizens and institutions, increased in frequency and in the number of their victims.

It may well have begun with a series of murders of American diplomats in Sudan and Lebanon during the Nixon and Ford administrations by the Palestine Liberation Organisation. It cannot be interpreted as just a coincidence that, for example, at the time of increasingly exposed weaknesses of the Communist bloc, in the brief time-span of 1983-4, the Hezbollah organisation conducted a number of successful suicide attacks aimed at America. In one of them, targeted at the American embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, 63 of its employees were killed, including the Middle East CIA director William Buckley, and 120 people were wounded. In the second such attack, on the American barracks at the Beirut Airport, 241 marines were killed and 81 wounded. Al Qaeda made itself heard internationally for the first time on August 7, 1998 by bombing the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, when the bombs killed more than 200 people. Among al Qaeda's other 'achievements' in the proceedings leading to the Third World War was an attack on the American destroyer ship *USS Cole* in Yemen on October 12, 2000. As a result of the attack, the ship was severely damaged, 17 sailors were killed and 39 wounded. The bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, which claimed 270 lives, was the most spectacular of all such attacks, until its spectacularity was overshadowed by the attack on the World Trade Center.

The US successful invasion, and rather unsuccessful occupation, of Iraq, as well as the Israeli unyielding stance toward the Palestinians, displayed, among others, in the assassination of Sheik Jassin as well as of his successor, and dozens

of similar incidents, demonstrate that the conflict can now only escalate. By now it is evident that the escalation of the conflict will not be confined to the Middle East.

If we adopt the above suggested and obvious date of 9/11, still one has to avoid other aspects of the American-centrist perspective on these events which, as mentioned at the outset, reduces the problem to terrorism. For one has to remember in this context that many Islamic terrorist operations, in Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Yemen, Israel and other places were not specifically aimed at the United States, even though Americans were often their victims. They were aimed at the Occident as a whole, and under them the Occident is gradually cracking in two. The rift in transatlantic relationships is, to some degree, the result of the difference in the perception of the Middle East problem by Europe and the United States. However, the cracks in the Occidental façade existed much earlier but were covered, and indeed caused, by the frost of the Cold War.

### **Expectation of Enthusiasm**

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked for his opinion about Western civilisation: 'It would be a good idea', he responded curtly. Indeed, from the point of view of other nations and civilisations, we continue to deceive ourselves that, since our actions are motivated by intentions of implementing our unquestionably good (for us) values in new regions and populations, this cannot be met with anything less than enthusiastic acceptance. The fact that it rarely occurs to any of us that it can be otherwise, explains our difficulty in acknowledging the negative judgement of Western civilisation expressed by Mahatma Gandhi. It also thwarts our attempts to understand reasons motivating our present enemies. These enemies have been created by ourselves - not in our own image, but counter-image.

Responsibility for their creation falls upon our aggressive expansionist and exclusivist civilisation. From our own point of view, the Western way of life finds its moral justification in democratic and liberal values. By believing in them, they

make us what we are. Ultimately, for us, they cannot be anything but the only true and valid ones. No wonder then that, as a rule, we rarely pause to consider the possibility that for other communities they are just an ideological façade serving as a justification for expansion of our mode of thinking, organisation of social life, economy and politics onto regions which are their homelands.

Expectation of universal and enthusiastic acceptance of our ideas, and of ourselves, has repeatedly proved to be unfounded. This became apparent some time ago, for example, in the Arab territories, through the experience of T. E. Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, archaeologist and soldier, but above all a British spy active among the Arab peoples. Lawrence wanted to unify the Arab tribes by establishing a parliamentary democracy for them. He was much dismayed to realise that the Arabs were unable to grasp the blessings of this invention.

Despite this and other experiences, we seem to be intrinsically unable to draw lessons from them. The American expectation of an enthusiastic welcome of the coalition armies in Iraq by the civilian people just freed from the deposed cruel tyrant in gratitude for their liberation is a case in point. Though one of many, this is one of the best examples of imperial amnesia. If we were to get rid of the Occidentalist moralist blindness, which did and continues to do its important service in the moralistic condemnation of Saddam Hussein, we would be able to see him *also* in a somewhat different light: as the chief obstacle in the expansion of American corporations into the oil-soaked territories which, unfortunately, were, and still are, controlled by political forces which succeed in defying attempts to be steered accordingly to the interests of the American imperial political and economic establishment.

### **The Exclusivist Condition**

The responsibility for the creation of the enemy with whom we are now waging the Third World War falls upon the aggressiveness of our way of life. This, in its turn, is a result of the exclusivism especially characteristic of the culture informed

by Judaistic religions. In its religious form, responsible for many European wars, the anti-Islamic crusades and anti-Semitic pogroms, the exclusivism has established a state of permanent hatred between the sister religions unknown in the relationships between other world religions. No wonder: no one is capable of stronger hate toward each other than members of the same family.

The mutual relationships between three religions stemming from the Judaist root, namely Judaism itself, Christianity, and Islam, present a clinical case of exclusivism. To illustrate the point, let us compare respective ideologies of parties involved in the Third World War. Sam Harris draws attention to the fact that the:

‘Koran [...] tells us it is the duty of every Muslim man to “make war on the infidels who dwell around you.” Osama bin Laden may be despicable, but it is hard to argue that he isn’t acting in accord with at least some of the teachings of the Koran. It is true that most Muslims seem inclined to ignore the Koran’s solicitations to martyrdom and jihad, but we cannot overlook the fact that some are not so inclined and that some of them murder innocent people for religious reasons. The phrase “the war on terrorism” is a dangerous euphemism that obscures the true cause of our troubles, because we are currently at war with precisely a vision of life presented to Muslims in the Koran. Anyone who reads this text will find non-Muslims vilified on nearly every page. How can we possibly expect devout Muslims to happily share power with “the friends of Satan?” Why did 19 well-educated, middle-class men trade their lives for the privilege of killing thousands of our neighbors? Because they believed, on the authority of the Koran, that they would go straight to paradise for doing so.’ (2004)

Yet this militant Islam finds its worthy opponent in no less militant forms of Christianity, especially in America, where, for example, a work entitled *Glorious Appearing* is among the best selling books of a similar kind which sell in tens of millions of copies worldwide. The book prophesies the second coming of Jesus. He is not coming this time, however, to save the blessed but to wipe all non-Christians from the planet. According to the book, it is enough for Jesus to just

speak in order to have the bodies of the enemy’s men and women ripped open, which he, in the book, actually does:

‘Jesus merely raised one hand a few inches and a yawning chasm opened in the earth, stretching far and wide enough to swallow all of them. They tumbled in, howling and screeching, but their wailing was soon quashed and all was silent when the earth closed itself again.’

In his review of the book Nicholas Kristof rhetorically asks:

‘Could devout fundamentalists really enjoy paradise as their friends, relatives and neighbors were heaved into hell? [...] This portrayal of a bloody Second Coming reflects a shift in American portrayals of Jesus, from a gentle Mister Rogers figure to a martial messiah presiding over a sea of blood. [...] This matters in the real world, in the same way that fundamentalist Islamic tracts in Saudi Arabia do. Each form of fundamentalism creates a stark moral division between decent, pious types like oneself - and infidels headed for hell. No, I don’t think the readers of *Glorious Appearing* will ram planes into buildings. But we did imprison thousands of Muslims here and abroad after 9/11, and ordinary Americans joined in the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in part because of a lack of empathy for the prisoners. It’s harder to feel empathy for such people if we regard them as infidels and expect Jesus to dissolve their tongues and eyes any day now. [...] Should we really give intolerance a pass if it is rooted in religious faith? Many American Christians once read the Bible to mean that African-Americans were cursed as descendants of Noah’s son Ham, and were intended by God to be enslaved. In the 19th century, millions of Americans sincerely accepted this Biblical justification for slavery as God’s word - but surely it would have been wrong to defer to such racist nonsense simply because speaking out could have been perceived as denigrating some people’s religious faith. People have the right to believe in a racist God, or a God who throws millions of nonevangelicals into hell. I don’t think we should ban books that say that. But we should be embarrassed when our best-selling books gleefully celebrate religious intolerance and violence against infidels. That’s not what America stands for, and I doubt that it’s what God stands for.’ (2004)

Kristof may be right as far as God is concerned. There are raising doubts, though, concerning the position of a substantial number of Americans.

Western exclusivism has undergone a dynamic evolution. From the nowadays atrophying Christian religions, it passed onto, or transformed itself into, nationalist ideas. What is really dangerous, is that the Judaist religions' exclusivism is infecting, by contact, religions and nations which until recently have managed to escape it. As Martha Nussbaum has demonstrated, the Hindu religion, thought for centuries to be among the most peaceful religions, has been infected with exclusivism through its contact with Western civilisation, as well as with Islam. In trying to explain a horrible genocide of Muslim women in Gujarat, in which more than 2000 Muslims, mostly women, were gruesomely mutilated and raped, she points to the general fact that:

'[h]umans [...] typically need a group of humans to bound themselves against, who come to symbolize the disgusting and who, therefore, insulate the community even further from its own animality. Thus, every society ascribes disgust properties - bad smell, stickiness, sliminess, foulness, decay - to some group of persons, who are therefore found disgusting and shunned, and who in this way further insulate the dominant group from what they fear facing in themselves. In many European societies Jews have played that role: they have been characterized as disgusting in those physical ways, and they have been represented symbolically as vermin who had those same properties. In the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy, *dalits*, formerly called "untouchables", played a related role: through their contact with waste products they were regarded as themselves contaminated, thus not to be touched by the pure person; their very existence in the community shielded the pure from the decay and stench of their own animality.<sup>74</sup>

For the present, recently unknown rightist interpretations of the Hindu religion, the role the Jews played in Europe and the *dalits* in India itself, are now being fulfilled by the Muslims.

One can say that nationalist ideas are a result of exclusivism deeply embedded in the nature of human culture as developed in the Middle East, Greece and Rome. The exclusivism, just like a parasite, has now found a new vehicle for itself; it is the rationalist-scientist and bourgeois liberal ideologies in their various forms. If seen from this angle, they can be interpreted as creative continuations of former modes of exclusivism embedded in human nature.

Among the vehicles of exclusivism are ideologies. The liberal democratic ideology, just like any other, is no exception to this rule. Just like others, it is also exclusivist in character. One has to remember, however, that it emerged in a fight against the most virulent religious and nationalist forms of exclusivism. For this reason its exclusivism is less virulent, just enough to be able to preserve its identity and difference from other ideologies. The problem of exclusivism in this case, just like in any other one, consists, however, not so much in the content of its ideas but in the mode of its advocacy. To put it bluntly: just as Islam can be advocated in a peaceful manner, so liberal ideas can be advocated in a fundamentalist way.

A good example of the exclusivist messianism of so called liberal democratic thinking has been provided recently by Rober Kagan according to whom:

'The United States must act in ways that benefit humanity, as it frequently tried to do in the past. It must certainly seek to benefit that part of humanity that shares America's liberal principles. At times of dire emergency, and perhaps especially at those times, the world's sole superpower needs to demonstrate that it wields its power on behalf of its principles and all who share them, including its democratic allies in Europe. The United States, in short, must pursue legitimacy in the manner truest to its nature, by promoting the principles of liberal democracy, not only as a means to a greater security but as *an end in itself*. The U.N. Security Council is not the only place to obtain legitimacy, as Europeans themselves know. *Americans can win legitimacy by promoting democracy and liberal reform in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti - and not by shirking their responsibilities*, especially in places where they have

wielded their great power. Success in such endeavours will provide the United States a measure of legitimacy, even in Europe.' (2004; my italics)

Indirectly Kagan demonstrates that liberal democratic ideas in Europe are understood and implemented in a less fundamentalist and less exclusivist manner than they are in the US. The present rift between the US and the EU results from the fact that they both aim at achieving some kind of unity of the world. The tension between them can be explained by the fact that they wish to achieve this unity in directly opposed ways. The US policy is an attempt to achieve unity through destroying the 'other'; for the US, unity is the unity of an imposed dogma. For the EU, unity is the unity of negotiated compromise. The second concept of unity, relativist and inclusivist, strives at achieving unity with as many 'others' as possible, through a process which is known as the 'fusion of horizons'. This difference also explains the belligerence of the US, as well as the much derided weakness of the EU.

Our Occidental civilisation as a whole, however, together with its liberalism and democracy, despite the cracks in the façade, has nowadays, in the eyes of the rest of the world, and especially in the Islamic regions, the face of George W. Bush. By allowing ourselves to be photographed in his company, we have to be prepared for the fact that our image will cause similar associations.

### **Modes of Combat**

As mentioned above, Western civilisation was not ready for the confrontation with the foe it had created in any respect: whether ideological, cultural, or even military. It was completely taken by surprise. This surprise would be less surprising if we were able to replace our universalism, stemming from an equally deep and uncritical belief in unquestionable goodness of values which motivates us, by a self-critical ethnocentrism. Few in the Western world were or are ready to acknowledge that our Western system of values may be seen by other cultures and civilisations as a fearful and repulsive danger.

One of the differences between the West and Islamic East is well illustrated by a difference between the dominant attitudes toward individual human life embedded in their moral and ideological systems. This difference makes itself apparent also in the modes of combat that developed in them, respectively.

The Western civilisation was deeply 'shocked by the arithmetic' of the human loss in the first two world wars. As is well known, this daunting arithmetic was immensely boosted by the invention of the machine gun. As a result, the West has now focused on the construction of weapons that work according to a principle which, for lack of a better name, can be called the *maximin* principle: our weapons enable our individual soldiers to inflict the greatest possible harm to our enemy whilst involving a minimal danger to themselves. This translates into the military practice of inventing equipment capable of great precision, greatest possible explosive power, and protection of its operator by the safest possible shield of armour, enabling them to eliminate their enemy efficiently with the simultaneous preservation of the most secure distance from harm. Also, the purpose of a soldier's physical fitness is to be able to approach the enemy as fast as possible, and to escape from the field unharmed, rather than to directly assault the enemy, which usually involves great risk to physical integrity.

Overall, the Western way of combat increasingly resembles the behaviour of a nerdy teenager who kills hundreds of virtual enemies on the screen of his computer but is afraid to go out to the playground for fear of getting hit by his peers hanging out there. Actually, a reverse though complementary phenomenon has been also observed recently (Silberman 2004): computer games, initially meant to provide a player with an interpassive possibility to enjoy in mock-wars without actually killing anyone, are nowadays employed in the training process of troops by providing a simulation of the combat environment. Such multimillion dollar installations have been devised by the Institute of Creative Technologies, the US Army funded research and development group at the Southern California University. The group consists of videogame developers, f/x artists and Pentagon experts who work to devise more effective ways of

preparing recruits for the frontline engagement. The major problem that was overcome by the proponents of this installation was to convince the Pentagon that 'not everyone in Hollywood is a freak'. This, as one may suppose, should not have been too difficult since Hollywood has educated most Western societies, including its generals, in the images of what war should look like. Thus, as the reality empowered by technology is now emulating the fantasy, our defenders in the 21st century will indeed be trained to live, play, fight and die in the Matrix.

The military *maximin* principle is another expression of the cultural and ideological foundations of Western civilisation, among which individualism - the highest value placed on the individual in relation to the community s/he belongs - plays the dominant role. The individualism underlies the documents defining the essence of our civilisation: The Charter of Fundamental Rights of Man, The Bill of Rights, which is a part of the Constitution of the United States, and The Charter of the Fundamental Rights included in the European Constitution. It has found its expression in other modes of organisation of our social life. No wonder that the military domain was not exempt from it.

The principle organising the modes of combat of the enemies of the West is in a direct contrast to this *maximin* principle and can be described as the *minimax* principle. The difference lies in the fact that its followers are supposed to inflict greatest possible harm onto the enemy with the ostentatiously minimal care for their own life or well-being. This principle, in its turn, is rooted, for one, in the technological backwardness of the civilisation, and ultimately in the traditionalist acceptance of the unquestioned superiority of the ethnic-religious community over its members.

### **Global, Homicidal, Expensive**

One of the features of the Third World War is the territorially *indefinite* theatre of military activities. Secondly, its theatre is territorially *unlimited*. Its third feature is the *homicidal, exterminative* dimension of the undertaken combative actions. Fourthly, it is going to be a *total* war. These four features pertain in

varying degree to the actions of both parties involved. Due to its unprecedented character, it is a wholly new kind of war - the *global* war.

It is to be expected that the hecatombs which were a result of recent attacks on the Western countries, which incidentally also demonstrate great tactical, political, and indeed geopolitical skills of the attackers, will be an encouragement and an incentive for new attacks. Their efficiency achieved thus far leads to the conclusion that different and as yet uncoordinated groups of terrorists will, for some time at least, compete between each other for domination not by mutual extermination but by competition in a new discipline. Namely, they will try to achieve pre-eminence by staging the most spectacular and bloody attack, in order to draw from it due glory and recognition from their rivals. The ruthlessness of the attacks perpetrated in the recent past also suggests that they will not hesitate to use nuclear weapons. For example, one of those bombs which the Russian General Alexander Lebedev could not account for in the secret arsenal of the KGB; or they will try to attack a nuclear power plant.

Each war is expensive. This one will be very expensive. The cost of the global war incurred thus far is hundreds of thousands of victims on both sides of the globe, and the multi-billion destruction of different places of the globe. It is also the cost of global fear which is gradually creeping into our private lives and our public spheres. This fear has already led to new costs that we will have to pay: limitations that are being imposed onto our individual citizens' rights in democratic countries, as well as necessary and expensive steps to guarantee our safety, which will most certainly prove insufficient anyway.

Whatever their targets, the terrorists are no doubt amazingly successful in their homicidal attempts. In view of the military and policing might of the Western world, it should be seen as a truly surprising fact. The ease with which terrorists perpetrated their attacks has put in doubt the power of the Western world. It has become evident that, having been preoccupied for the past six decades with the task of building military power aimed at confinement of the Communist danger,

the individualistic, consumptionist and protectionist Western civilisation, despite its economic and military might built to confront its now defunct enemy, has not been prepared for the confrontation with its new one. However, the exposed weakness of Western power has already become a very good excuse for the occidental militarists to step up the defence expenditures. The occidental militarists will probably be among the few ones to benefit from the situation. Instead of taking a chance to manage and dissolve the clash, they will head for its escalation, dragging us all along with them into the abyss.

Judging by the costs of the production of this show thus far, we are in for the best of possible shows ever. We have written its script ourselves. Now we shall play all roles in it: those of its viewers, actors, and victims.

5

#### NOTES:

1. The idea of calling the present global situation the Third World War was formulated simultaneously by the former ambassador of Poland to India and a political commentator, Krzysztof Mroziewicz, and myself. Mroziewicz has published his paper to that effect in a Polish weekly journal *Polityka* (2004); the title of his paper was, however, castrated by overcautious editors of his journal from 'The Third World War' into 'The Crawling World War'.
2. Indeed they do not. A conservative intellectual, Norman Podhoretz, recently published an emotional paper entitled 'World War IV: How It Started, What It Means, and Why We Have to Win' (2004). The present war, called the third by me, he considers to be the fourth since he counts the Cold War as the third one.
3. For more on the instigative role of some intellectuals in shaping the post-9/11 course of American foreign policy, see a series of publications by Shadia Drury on Leo Strauss and the 'cabal' of his pupils who have assumed a number of influential positions in the US administration, media and education, to be found at <<http://www.uregina.ca/arts/CRC>>; the homepage displays a number of other, no less interesting papers by Drury on Strauss and the Straussians. For Strauss and Straussians' role in shaping the imperial politics of the US, also see Nicolas Xenos (2004).
4. Despite that, as some polls have revealed, a sense of shared guilt is not uncommon among the Americans themselves. In a CBS/NYT poll conducted in September 2002, 21 per cent of Americans placed 'a lot of blame', whereas 53 per cent 'some blame' on the US policies in the Middle East. In another poll, by the *Los Angeles Times*, in September 2002, 58 per cent of Americans said the attacks were 'a direct result of the US policy in the Middle East'; in another still, by the Pew Research Center conducted in August 2002, 53 per cent of Americans said that the 9/11 attacks were 'mostly' reflecting the 'political beliefs' of the terrorists.
5. Gore Vidal commented upon this rhetoric with his typical vitriol: 'To watch Bush doing his little war dance in Congress . . . about "evildoers" and this "axis of evil". [...] I thought, he doesn't even know what the word axis means. Somebody just gave it to him. [...] This is about as mindless a statement as you could make. Then he comes up with about a dozen other countries that have "evil" people in them, who might commit "terrorist acts." What is a terrorist act? Whatever he thinks is a terrorist act. And we are going to go after them. Because we are good and they are evil. And we're "gonna git 'em".'
6. 'There are now more people in our country who believe that the universe was created in six solar days than there were in Europe in the 14th century. In the eyes of most of the civilized world, the United States is now a rogue power - imperialist, inarticulate and retrograde in its religiosity. Our erstwhile allies are right not to trust our judgment. We elect leaders who squander time and money on issues like gay marriage, Janet Jackson's anatomy, Howard Stern's obscenities, marijuana use and a dozen other trifles lying at the heart of the Christian social agenda, while potentially catastrophic problems like nuclear proliferation and climate change go unresolved.' (Harris 2004)
7. For more about the reasons for the differences between the US and Europe see my paper (2005, in Polish), 'Wymiary i ciężary Europy' ['Dimensions and Burdens of Europe'].
8. Quotations taken from George W. Bush's speeches.
9. It is worth noting that due to the far-reaching privatisation of the public sphere in the West, the reverse transactions, i.e. the purchases of private corporations, including private media networks, by the state have become almost impossible and nearly unknown. This is not only due to the diminishing purchasing power of the state, but also due to an ideological barrier: public media controlled by the state, even if it were a democratic one, seems to be a calamity to liberally-minded ideologues and the liberally-informed public.

10. An interpretation somewhat similar to the one sketched here has been dismissed by Adam Gopnik as inadequate in explaining the causes of the First World War (see Gopnik 2004). He argues that according to the interpretation (which he calls the 'leftist inevitabilism' and which is associated with Lenin's metapolitical views of history and politics) the First World War was an inevitable consequence of imperial rivalry between colonial and industrial powers of Germany, France and Britain which were driven by thirst for new markets and new resources. It is this rivalry which turned an essentially economic rivalry into a military one. Gopnik asserts that nothing really remains of this hypothesis. To support this claim he says that bankers and industrialists were the last people in Europe who wanted a war: 'Capital's overwhelming desire was for peace and continued globalization. It was Lord Rothschild who entreated the Times of London to tone down the belligerence of its articles, and right up to the end the governor of the Bank of England was begging the Liberal cabinet minister Lloyd George, "with tears in his eyes", to keep Britain out of war.'

Gopnik's dismissal of this hypothesis is, however, rather easy to dismiss in an equally off-hand manner. Firstly for example, he neglects to list the long line of industrialists who had made fortunes on supplies for the German, British or French armies. Secondly, having dismissed this hypothesis, Gopnik is reduced to the explanation of the causes of the First World War in which a handful of people seem to be responsible for it all, namely: 'Kaiser Wilhelm, the deformed lesser member of the dominant royal family of Europe, intensely jealous of his cousin Edward VII and his Francophile ways (although Edward had died by 1910, the icon still shone), and determined to act in a manly and warriorlike way, yet caught in a bizarre cycle of peevishness, belligerent insecurity, and a superstitious fatalism that he thought of as "religious"; [...] Count Conrad, who genuinely seems to have acted in part because he was in love with a married woman and imagined that success in war would help his romance; [and] Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister, who for some reason gets off very lightly in British histories, seems hopelessly inadequate to the occasion. Although he, of all people, should have had the brains and the presence of mind to grasp what was coming - and he did; he went for a solitary drive, "filled with sadness", on the day the war began - he hewed to the customs of cabinet government, conceding the initiative to Lord Grey, his foreign secretary, and was remarkably passive throughout the crucial July days. (He paid the worst possible price for his failure, losing his eldest son in the war).'

Thirdly, despite his rebuttal of the 'leftist inevitabilism', Gopnik acknowledges that it preserves its validity in the following aspect: 'in every European country, the center-right establishment, faced with some kind of social-democratic or socialist challenge, reasoned that a national call to arms would be the one sure antidote to internal division. In every case - even in France, where the lines of division ran deepest - this turned out to be true, and "class division melted like butter in the frying pan of nationalism".'

I am quite satisfied with that point he concedes, for even if it explains why Lenin was wrong and why his expectations were severely disappointed after the outbreak of the First World War, it paradoxically confirms the power of ideology which was an important discovery of a significantly better leftist writer than Lenin, i.e. Karl Marx.

11. A recent example of a purchase of a state president took place in Lithuania. It was exposed in a legal procedure which led to a successful impeachment of him. To quote West again: 'The overwhelming power and influence of plutocrats and oligarchs in the economy put fear and insecurity in the hearts of anxiety-ridden workers and render money-driven, poll-obsessed elected officials deferential to corporate goals of profit, often at the cost of the common good' (2004).

12. By far the best, if not only, book on the concept of voluntary servitude is Michael Rosen's *On Voluntary Servitude: False Consciousness and The Theory of Ideology* (1996). The concept itself has been formulated by Michel de Montaigne's friend Étienne de la Boetie in his essay *De la servitude volontaire* (1552).

13. The usefulness of this as an agonistic instrument has been initially tested in my book *Open Society or Community?* (2001; published in Polish).

14. In Nussbaum's explanation of the genocide of women she points to the Hinduist extreme right wing movements and also to the saddening fact that the construction of Hinduism put forward by the Hindu right is not traditional or indigenous, but is borrowed mostly from European fascism greatly admired by the founders of the Hindu right (2004).

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**NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS:****Carbon Defense League**

The Carbon Defense League (CDL), founded in 1997 in Pittsburgh PA, is a media arts and engineering practice and writing collective with no central location. Membership is open and comprised of both visible and invisible members from Australia, Spain, Holland, Germany, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, from disciplines such as design, architecture, geography, fine art, robotics, computer programming, and critical theory. CDL creates projects that raise discussion at points of confrontation as part of a splintered practice with no central theme. CDL has shown work, participated in panels, and led workshops throughout North America and Europe and has received awards from media art festivals and organisations such as Rhizome.org, New York; Memefest, Slovenia; and Transmediale, Germany. CDL is part of the Hactivist Tactical Media Network <<http://www.hactivist.com>>, which was founded online in 1999 as a way of showcasing the other diverse activities of collective members.  
<<http://www.carbondefense.org/>>

**Conglomco Media Conglomeration**

Conglomco Media Conglomeration is a collaborative team of tech-savvy artists, activists, musicians, and pranksters based in the US and UK. Working in conceptual and media-based practices, their work includes performance, video and live art, as well as direct action. An important part of Conglomco's practice is the application of the malfunction (or glitch) in technology as a theatrical tool and performance tactic. Conglomco's members form a discourse that is constitutive of the group's obsession with the intersection of human and machine, and their ironic, but critical analysis of the mass media and corporate control. Join the pursuit!  
<<http://www.conglomco.org/>>

**Adam J. Chmielewski**

Adam J. Chmielewski is professor of philosophy in the Institute of Philosophy, University of Wrocław, Poland, social activist and political columnist. He studied philosophy in Wrocław, Oxford, and New York. He has authored five books, including *Popper's Philosophy: A Critical Analysis* (1995), *Incommensurability, Untranslatability, Conflict* (1997), and *Open Society or Community?* (2001), a book devoted to the philosophical and moral foundations of liberalism and its contemporary communitarian critique. He has translated a number of books from English into Polish, among these works by Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Shusterman, Slavoj Žižek as well as novels. He is also a freelance writer for several journals in Poland and abroad, and a member of editorial boards of Polish and international journals.

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Jordan Crandall is an artist and media theorist. He is Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego. His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions worldwide, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz; ARTLAB, Tokyo; Museo de Arte Carillo Gil, Mexico City; Centre d'Art Contemporain de Basse-Normandie, Caen; Kunst-Werke, Berlin; the Kitchen, New York; AGORA, Rio de Janeiro; Edith Russ Site für Medienkunst, Oldenburg; and the Witte de With center for contemporary art, Rotterdam. An anthology of Crandall's projects and critical writing *Drive: Technology, Mobility, and Desire* has recently been published by Hatje Cantz Verlag, Germany. Crandall's most recent book is *Under Fire 1: The Organization and Representation of Violence*, Witte de With (2004).  
<<http://jordancrandall.com>>

## Gamebozz Orchestra

Gamebozz Orchestra Project is an experimental audio-visual project based on the use of the GameBoy console as a musical instrument. The group has been active since 2001, currently with six players from Klodzki Osrodek Kultury. The Gamebozz Orchestra Project has performed at a number of venues including WRO Media Art Biennale, Wroclaw; Read\_Me festival, Moscow; *Unplugged*, Ars Electronica Festival, Linz; Warsaw Electronic Festival; Microscopesession, Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden; Paris/Creteil; and Club transmediale.03, Berlin. Gamebozz Orchestra Project members are Jaroslaw Kujda, Pawel Janicki, Mariusz Jura, Malgorzata Kujda, Agnieszka Kujda, Tomasz Prockow. The project is supported by WRO Center for Media Art, Wroclaw, Poland.  
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## Brian Holmes

Brian Holmes is an art critic, activist and translator, living in Paris, primarily interested in the intersections of artistic and political practice. He holds a doctorate in Romance Languages and Literatures from the University of California at Berkeley. He was the English editor of publications for Documenta X, Kassel (1997), was a member of the graphic arts group Ne pas plier from 1999 to 2001, and has taken part in a series of 'counter-globalisation movements' since June 18, 1999. Currently he collaborates with the French conceptual art group Bureau d'études. He is a frequent contributor to the international mailing list *Nettime*, a member of the editorial committee of the journal *Springerlin*, Vienna, and is currently completing an anthology of essays and starting a critical journal, *Autonomie Artistique*. He is also a member of the trans-national editorial staff of *Multitudes*.

## Margarete Jahrmann

Margarete Jahrmann is an artist living in Vienna and Zurich, where she is a professor for mediapoiesis at the Media Arts Department, University of Art and Design, Zurich. Her work is based on games, modding (modifications in hard and software), and Coding Scenes. She is interested in the development of a discourse and theoretical framework for collaborative art works, on coded cultures, and the mis en scene of artifacts and 'objectiles' in an arts and research context. Her work has been exhibited internationally in workshops, festivals, and galleries such as Beijing Red Gate Gallery (2004); Computerspiele von Künstlerinnen, Dortmund (2004); and

Art In Motion Festival 04, Armory Center for the Arts, Los Angeles. In 1996 she co-founded the konsum art server <<http://www.konsum.net>> focusing on network processes as arts material. Her work in collaboration with the artist Max Moswitzer has won various awards, such as the award of distinction at Prix Ars Electronica 03; honorable mention at the Software Arts Award at Transmediale 04 festival, Berlin; and the research award of the Artists in Labs Program at the artificial intelligence lab, Zurich.  
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## Esther Leslie

Esther Leslie teaches in the School of English and Humanities, Birkbeck, University of London. Her writings include *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (Pluto, 2000), and *Hollywood Flatlands, Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant Garde* (Verso, 2002). Her next book *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (Reaktion, 2005) is a study of the German chemical industry in relation to the Romantic philosophy of nature, and the politics, poetics and aesthetics of modernity. She is actively involved in editing three journals: *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory; Radical Philosophy*; and *Revolutionary History*; and has also co-edited and contributed to a collection called *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture* (Chipmunka 2000) She translated Georg Lukács' *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness; Tailism and the Dialectic* (Verso, 2000).  
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## Marysia Lewandowska & Neil Cummings

Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings have collaborated together since 1995. A long-term book project *The Value of Things* (August/Birkhauser, 2000) traced the parallel history of the Public Museum and the Department Store. *Capital*, a series of seminars, publication and gift, was the inaugural project in the Contemporary Interventions series at Tate Modern, which involved the cooperation of the Bank of England (May-September 2001). In July 2004, *Enthusiasts*, an exhibition involving Amateur Film Clubs attached to factories in socialist Poland opened at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw; the project will be reconfigured as *Enthusiasm* and travel to the Whitechapel Gallery, London, Kunst Werke, Berlin, and the Tapies Foundation in Barcelona in 2005.  
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## Armin Medosch

Armin Medosch is a London based writer, artist and curator. His latest book is *Freie Netze - Free Networks*, published in German (Heise Verlag, 2003), a non-fiction book about the politics, history and culture of (wireless) community networks. From 1996 to 2002, he was co-editor of Telepolis - the award winning 'magazine of net-culture'. He is currently working on a new book on the relationships between science, technology and societal change. Medosch frequently organises, curates and contributes to international conferences, most recently to DMZ Media Arts Festival, London; Wizards of OS3, Berlin; Futuresonic, Manchester; Transmediale 04, Berlin; Crosstalks, Brussels; Basics, Salzburg; and RAM5, Riga. He is a member of the University of Openness <<http://twentiethcentury.com/uo/>>, and teaches as associate senior lecturer on postgraduate courses 'Networked Media Environments' and 'Interactive Digital Media' at Ravensbourne College, UK.

## Julian Priest

Julian Priest is an independent researcher working on social aspects of technology for the developed and developing world. He was co-founder of Consume.net (with James Stevens), Europe's first wireless freenet network community and is an active participant in the freenetworking movement. He is currently working within the Informal research framework <<http://informal.org.uk>> developing new projects, writing and commenting internationally in fields such as development, arts and policy.

## Raqs Media Collective

Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula & Shuddhabrata Sengupta) is a group of media practitioners working in new media, installations, video, sound, photography and text. The collective is based in Delhi. Together with Ravi Sundaram and Ravi Vasudevan, Raqs co-founded Sarai <<http://www.sarai.net>> at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. Raqs has exhibited installation, print and other media projects at, amongst others, the 50th Venice Biennale; Documenta11, Kassel; Palais de Beaux Arts, Brussels; Emocao Artifical, Sao Paulo; Generali Foundation Gallery, Vienna; Ars Electronica, Linz; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Roomade Office for Contemporary Art, Brussels. Their most recent projects include *Considering Residue: Table Maps for Liverpool*, Liverpool Biennial; and *The Impostor in the Waiting Room*, Bose/Pacia Modern, New York.

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<<http://www.raqsmediacollective.net>>

## Mirko Tobias Schäfer

Mirko Tobias Schäfer lives in Rotterdam and Vienna. He studied theatre, film and media studies, and communication studies at the University of Vienna where he received a masters degree in philosophy. He also studied digital culture at Utrecht University. He was organiser and co-curator of *[d]vision - Vienna Festival For Digital Culture*. Since February 2003, he has been working as a junior teacher/researcher at the University of Utrecht at the Institute for Media and Re/presentation. Currently, he is writing his dissertation on *Bastard Culture! Competent Users, Networks and Cultural Industries*.

<<http://www.dvision.at/mirko>>

## James Stevens

James Stevens lives and works in London, and is actively engaged in a range of collaborative projects at SPC utilising WiFi, AV and print mechanisms to further the development of cross-cultural, counter-commercial initiatives for self-provision and evolution of social environments. SPC is orchestrated from a rooftop media lab in Greenwich, London, called Deckspace. He is a co-founder of Consume.net (with Julian Priest), the UK's largest free network advocacy and has championed the use of microwave radio data networks since 2000.

<<http://www.spc.org>>

## Jeremy Valentine

Jeremy Valentine works in media and culture at Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh. With Benjamin Ardit, he is the co-author of *Polemicalisation: The Contingency of the Commonplace* (New York University Press, 1999) and co-editor of the monograph series *Taking On The Political* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999). His recent publications include 'Audit Society, Practical Deconstruction and Strategic Public Relations', *parallax* 31 (2004) and 'Art and Empire: Aesthetic Autonomy, Organisational Mediation and Contextualising Practices', in *Art, Money Parties: New Institutions in the Political Economy of Contemporary Art*, edited by Jonathan Harris (2004). He is currently reading theories of culture and governance.

## The Yes Men

For four long years, the Yes Men (Andy Bichlbaum & Michael Bonanno) impersonated World Trade Organisation officials on international TV and at business conferences around the world. They first gained notoriety after their spoof WTO site <<http://www.gatt.org>> was mistaken for the real thing. They went to every extreme to satirise WTO policies, even deploying at one point a metre-long golden phallus - but none of the experts noticed! A recent film on their WTO exploits was released by United Artists (2004).

<<http://www.theyesmen.org/>>

