

THE CRITICAL DELUSION OF IMMATERIAL LABOUR

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Abstract

There is an idea of immaterial labour: given that no worker is truly autonomous, the working class formed around the abode of immaterial labour edges in that direction. This idea enjoys a particularly strong hold among people contemplating employment in industries radically transformed or even spawned anew by digitisation, a fine illustration of which is the new media sector comprising Website developers, and e-marketers, to name but two of the more popular areas of specialisation, yet the idea's underlying premises made their appearance a long time before the *digital condition* ascended in the epicentre of our technologically hypertrophic societies. However, not only this rather ambiguous idea is not grounded in pragmatism, and is thus poised to result in huge misunderstandings as to the social relations of production that the hyped-up class of knowledge workers seems to be defined by; but most importantly, it is also bringing into force a new dialectic of hyper-exploitation in which a multitude of people, both highly-qualified warriors of the digital revolution and deskilled, underpaid manual labour destined to man the call centres in India, give away (all or part of) their labour for free without demanding, or being capable of demanding, anything in return. This essay sheds light upon this multi-faceted problematic, and elucidates on the ends and means by which this obscure master - slave dialectic is set in motion.

METHODOLOGY & STRUCTURE

This text was written in the space of twelve months, from August 2004 to August 2005, and is the resulting synthesis of a collection of notes on immaterial labour that were collected during this period. There was no immediate need, at least in the beginning, to concern oneself with methodology – a conscious choice that pressed itself into the finalised text – , and, on the other hand, this text makes no claim to have analysed exhaustively the sphere of immaterial labour. Having said that, and having alerted the reader to this methodological peculiarity, the text probes into the fields relating to a non-methodical critique of the myths that animate both the elevation of immaterial labour to the foundational *a priori* and thus presupposition of the long-postponed universal social revolution, and the reconfiguration of Capital and its organs (*ie.* the Corporation) that is commanded by the tendency apparently embodied by the subject (of immaterial labour) to become self-conscious to the extent that it enters the production process *different*, emancipated. Although we have not captured the ontological condition which derives from the given stage of material as well as immaterial production on the valid methodological basis of a constant economic process-change unfolding throughout history, our analysis, however, is informed by the perspective of economic history and descends into the abode of spectacular production, which is where immaterial labour appears to be illusory in that its ideological projections into the future promise a truly emancipated society.

Further, in collecting these notes, and then in analysing them, a constant tendency to drift toward abstraction and generalisation was encountered, which, we tried to restrain by focusing on the new media industry whenever we felt that the clarity of our argument was at stake, or that we started losing focus. That is why the new media industry at large is used throughout the text as the main reference point.

The text is structured in two parts, linked together by the interlude in which a recap of the preceding discussion is given. The first section looks into immaterial labour through the perspective of mobility, and analyses the extent to which enhanced mobility translates into enhanced radicalisation; comments on the vagueness of the concept of immaterial labour; explains how and why geography asserts its hegemony in cyberspace, and, in parallel, comments on the rise of cyber-topology; and last, underlines several characteristics of work done in the service of signs, and how, as a result, the labour market is affected. A critique of everyday life forms the backbone of the second part, which examines the role of education, illegal distribution, free software and open sources, volunteer and unwaged labour. The second part concludes

with a radical re-reading of affective labour, and its significance; and a discussion of the emerging dialectic of play. In the closing section, a discussion on class reconfigurations, technological determinism, historicism and the dialectical development of history, and radical subjectivity is given.

WHAT IS IMMATERIAL IN IMMATERIAL LABOUR?

There is no such thing as an immaterial labourer. A labourer who is immaterial does not exist. Period. And this is not going to change, at least not before software-based systems develop their own unique consciousness that will, in turn, render physical labour, that is, human (living) labour, obsolete, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the fully-automated, human-less factory. To avoid any misunderstanding, we should make it crystal clear from the outset that what is immaterial in immaterial labour is not the labour itself but that which results from the production process involved, may that be relationships, affects, ideas, data, information, knowledge, images, situations, or software. Also, as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt point out in *Multitude*, “immaterial labour almost always mixes with material forms of labour”: for instance, the labour of the nurse at the hospital consists of both caressing the patients and stooping the floor¹. Or, differently put, “the subject of this labour, the social worker, is a cyborg, a machinic hybrid and organism which constantly crosses the boundaries separating material from immaterial labour”². This characteristic would further obstruct any attempt to categorise workers either as immaterial or material, even in the obscene case that such an attempt were made, for, like we said, there is no such thing as an immaterial worker. It is also noteworthy that, from this standpoint, immaterial labour did not appear ten or twenty years ago, but it dates back to antiquity. It is only recently though that immaterial labour has been endowed with the fairy dust of autonomy and revolt.

DIGITAL MATERIALISM

In the space of the last thirty-five years, it has been stressed time and again that what drives economic growth, which in turn, it is presumed, begets social growth, is brains and not brawn. The new wealth of nations is determined by their capacity to turn their accumulated knowledge into innovation, declared Michael Porter in *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, echoing the familiar claims by hordes of

1 Negri, Antonio and Hardt, Michael. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. Penguin Putnam, p.109.

2 Negri, Antonio and Hardt, Michael. 2001. *The Labour of Dionysus*. Translated by Παναγιώτης Καλαμαράς, Αθήνα: Ελευθεριακή Κουλτούρα. Translated from Greek by the author.

organisational theorists, economists and pundits like John Kenneth Galbraith, Peter Drucker, and Charles Handy who have long been prophesising the rise of the knowledge worker and alerting CEOs around the world to the fact that the most valuable corporate asset in today's ultra-volatile marketplace is no longer at their disposal exactly because it resides into the heads of their employees. At the centre of the conception of the market value of intangibility lies the assumption of the inevitability of historical development away from past fordist recipes to imaginative and fulfilling work arrangements, exemplified by temporary autonomous production and consumption zones, enacted and terminated at the whims of digitally inclined technostructures. The time had come for the hegemony of the knowledge worker, and with him the rise of the boundaryless, flexible, virtual, networked, and, most importantly, *humane* corporation that valued people before profits was seen as inevitable. No more command-and-control. No more gargantuan in size hierarchies. No more the 'boss knows it all'. No more management by objectives. No more management by fear. Hail the knowledge era where workers are mobile and powerful. *All hail the knowledge worker.*

Since the furious days of May '68, all hopes for workers' empowerment seem to have gradually converged on a single vanishing point: *digitisation*. “The Net is haunted by the disappointed hopes of the Sixties. Because this new technology symbolises another period of rapid change, many contemporary commentators look back to the stalled revolution of thirty years ago to explain what is happening now”³. And that is because “increasingly people do not want to be managed. For good reason, people are increasingly attracted to the new deal the Internet seems to offer: self-managed work”⁴. Similarly, the hope for social revolution has been restored due to the emancipatory potential of the digital Utopia. “The slogans of Paris students in 1968 – 'All power to the imagination' and 'It's the dream that's real' – seem to be made true by digital technology. The Internet helps build self-regulating communities of the kind that 1960s hippies could only create with the help of drugs, tents, and loud music. Now you can go online to share, collaborate, jam, have sex and join-in”⁵.

At the same time that the corporate world embraced cyberspace for its capacity to streamline business processes and reinvent the scope for conducting business on a scale that was previously beyond imagination, people all over the world looked to cyberspace in order to reinvent the scope of their lives. Cyberspace was reckoned to

3 Barbrook, Richard. Holy Fools, *Mute*, Issue 11, August 26, and at <http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/theory-holyfools.html>

4 Leadbeater, Charles. 2002. *Up the Down Escalator*. Viking, p. 127.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 134

be the awakening of a long hidden dream, the dream that could be real if enough people shared it. And crucially, it was reckoned that it was only a matter of time for the dream, sprayed with the magic dust of cyber-Utopia, to come full circle, thereby obliterating the poverty of everyday life. Cyberspace was flooded with romanticism and optimistic immigrants, and for the first time it seemed that both the market and the state could be done away. Apparently, people did not need their mediation to communicate, collaborate, and share. The long dawn of communism (or anarcho-communism) seemed to be finally upon us: people *en masse* indulged in sharing themselves and their digital properties with others, with no fear of being ridiculed or marginalised by a barbarian society founded on fear, hatred, inequality, and poverty. The specter of communism that once haunted Europe now had crossed over the Atlantic, and - silently as the wind - it started to invade the houses of millions of average Joes, turning them into unconscious communists⁶. The whisper was getting louder and louder by the day: cyberspace was only the beginning of a long avalanche of changes whose dynamic would propel the world toward a society of affluence in which people would receive according to their needs and give according to their abilities. The dialectic was no longer a discredited Idea of Freedom: it was here, for what appears exists. And the soldiers of fortune that populated this vibrant new space - knowledge workers - emerged as the working class that would claim its autonomy. That was what we were told. All phenomena pointed to the same conclusion: a new era had finally arrived in which human existence would be freed from the constraints imposed upon it by the imperatives of material progress. And in that marvelous new era people would not work to survive, but to fulfil their dreams and their creativity.

ON GAME DIALECTICS, ASSUMPTIONS OF MOBILITY, AND MYTHS OF GLOBAL EQUITY

It is true that those employed in the so-called creative and 'new media' industries do indeed enjoy a certain degree of autonomy, but this need not mean, and it certainly does not mean that they are autonomous to define the rules of engagement to which they will, with no exception, abide. In a time when control is exercised through global telecommunication networks, one would reasonably expect that the operators of the matrix and the citizens of cyberia - exempt as they are from the spatial forces of geography - would not be subject to the rules of the game all workers are playing under the orchestrating directions of the globalisation maestro. What is this game? Roughly speaking, it is a zero-sum game with two entities competing against each other. For example, a Nigerian soccer team is playing the exact same game that its

6 See Moglen, Eben. 2003. *The DotCommunist Manifesto*. January, at <http://emoglen.law.columbia.edu/publications/dcm.html>

English counterpart does, and is bound by the exact same rules, and on occasion those two teams may even cross their swords on the terrain of the game, but, ultimately, they are nothing alike with respect to the conditions their respective players have to work under and their remuneration. In a similar vein, *ceteris paribus*, a freelance Web developer in Greece charges, say, ten euros per hour of work, as opposed to the one hundred euros per hour of work that his American counterpart does. Both developers are playing the same game, and they are bound by the same rules, however, they are not in the same league.

At this point, please allow me a brief digression that will help us later in understanding why a game dialectic is central to immaterial labour, and why the latter concept is often invoked as the archetypical model of the seemingly increasing autonomy enjoyed by those engaged in the new media industry. Part of the attractiveness of the working class concept of immaterial labour emanates from the assumption that it is instantly and constantly mobile, both in terms of the subject (the worker) and the object (the end-product that comes out of the production process) involved. Furthermore, immaterial labour is reckoned to be perfectly compatible with the flows of global capital by means of envisaging the exact same quintessential characteristics that define global capital. As such, immaterial labour could be imagined to be omnipotent in the exact same ways global capital flows are, and hence, knowledge workers, regardless of their geographical whereabouts, could be seen as among the ones most favoured by the changes brought about by globalisation. To an overwhelming extent, this assumption of mobility and geographic obliviousness holds true, yet the assumption of global equity and equivalence that follows from the first assumption is a mere myth designed to perpetuate the needs of the spectacle. In the globalised economy, capital flows are decoupled from constraints once imposed by the embodiment of geographically-rooted legitimate authority – the nation state – and the instruments (taxation) upon which the nation state depended to regulate capital flows and so is immaterial labour too. To clarify this, consider the following paradox made possible by the practicalities of the Internet economy: I am a freelance Web developer living in Greece, and I have developed a multilingual Website on behalf of a company registered in America, however, the end product of my work – the Website – is hosted at a Web Server in the Netherlands, but it is made accessible to users and customers worldwide, many of whom come to the Website (and hand their fares over to it with the help of online transaction systems) from different countries. Also, in line with the company's marketing strategy and brand positioning, the Website was designed to promote the image of the company as being truly global, knowing no geographical boundaries in the reach and richness of its marketing communications

and service delivery. The question that arises is which country should tax me for the fee I received from the company owning the Website: Greece, America, the Netherlands or all of them together? Same goes for the company owning the Website: should they pay taxes in America, the Netherlands, Greece, or in all these places? Obviously, for one reason or another, all parties involved, with the exception of the IRS, will opt for the *pay taxes nowhere* option⁷. Problems facing the nation state in collecting taxes aside, the above example is typical of the connection between immaterial labour and global capital, a connection further amplified by the complications inherent in conducting business online. If global capital is the blood that runs through the veins of the commercial Internet, immaterial labour is the elastic spine of the e-commerce technotopia.

In greater detail, the element of mobility helps explain why this (working⁸) class concept is situated in the vanguard of the post-industrial digital revolution. Labour mobility has been historically a key determinant of labour power, and any well worked-out strategy that seeks to empower labour should aim at enhancing and extending this mobility, write Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire*. Were we to accept this as true, we would invariably be led to the conclusion that new media workers are very powerful in setting the tone for the production process, that is to say,

7 As a partial fix to this problem, many countries are considering enforcing a uniform, standard *Internet tax* on all commodities sold and bought online. Also, for a more elaborate treatise on how the Internet economy is hindering the collection of taxes by geographically - constrained authorities, see Lessig, Lawrence. 1999. *Code: and other laws of cyberspace*. New York: Basic Books. It should also be mentioned that the field deserves further critical analysis as it is through taxation that the commodity-form and the money-form are constituted. "As a general rule, it is taxation that monetarises the economy; it is taxation that creates money, and it necessarily creates it in motion, in circulation, with turnover, and also in a correspondence with services and goods in the current of that circulation." (Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Felix. 2001. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Continuum International Publishing Group – Mansell, p.443.). The question thus of what happens when the simultaneity and equivalence of the three [taxation, goods-services, money] cannot develop is important. And it is in light of the possibilities opened up by this perspective that the current plight-argument for a universal "Content Flatrate - Peer-to-Peer tax" (see <http://www.contentflatrate.org/>) should be considered.

8 It is interesting to note that although Negri and Hardt deny affirmatively that the (waged) working class is the revolutionary subject today, they locate that revolutionary subject in the field of (immaterial) labour and (biopolitical) production, thus, still, articulating it in terms of a working class concept. This can be explained partly because, according to the orthodox Marxian doctrine, the revolutionary subject can only be composed by subjects deeply incorporated in the production process and whose bondage is manifested primarily through the legalese device of the employment contract; the "non-productive" (that is, subjects that do not produce; and *not* subjects that do not work, *ie.* People employed in the service industry) are at best seen as an auxiliary and peripheral appendage to the struggle, and at worst as a reactionary force aligned with the interests of the status quo due to their not having a proper worker's conscience. Knowledge workers and hackers certainly are productive in that it could be suggested that any word posted on a weblog, any html file uploaded to the Web, and any clever hack to the Linux kernel, enrich the common. Their productivity, performativity and market value also manifests itself when juxtaposing the market capitalisations of Microsoft and General Motors: Microsoft is worth much more money despite the fact that the physical assets it owns are negligible when compared to General Motors's.

they operate on an autonomous plane whereupon work conditions are not exploitative and autonomy is an inalienable right of them. This quality makes the idea of immaterial labour attractive to Leftists in much the same way that it is also compatible with the dominant neoliberal ideology on the Net: anarcho-capitalism⁹. In the theoretical sphere surrounding immaterial labour, the socialist cry for workers' emancipation and the dominant post-industrial capitalist system's need for semi-autonomous knowledge workers – a need further exacerbated by the imperatives of sophisticated technology production¹⁰ - are largely indistinguishable in the rhetoric they employ; they overlap in the subjectivities they produce; and they both fall prone to the same cognitive errors. Here, it is worth mentioning one example that illustrates this conceptual overlap from both Left and Right with regard to the concept in concern. Brian Holmes offers a treatise that is indicative of the Left's firm belief and hope in the emancipatory potential embodied by immaterial labour:

“The basic notion of immaterial labor is that the manipulation of information, but also the interplay of affects, have become central in the contemporary working process even in the factories, but much more so in the many forms of language-, image- and ambience-production. Workers can no longer be treated like Taylorist gorillas, exploited for their purely physical force; the 'spirit of the worker' has to come down onto the factory floor, and from there it can gain further autonomy by escaping into the flexible work situations developing on the urban territory”¹¹.

9 Anarcho-capitalists cling to the belief that capitalism would be much more humane and emancipatory if the state were to be done away in the race for profit. What they do not realise is that the 'institutional support and protection' of the state is fundamental for the sustainability and operation of capitalism: *take the state out of the equation and capitalism will falter*. For a manifesto of anarcho-capitalism tailored to the hegemony of immaterial labour, free software/open source software, and the Internet economy, see Raymond, Eric S. 2001. *The Cathedral & the Bazaar : Musings on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolutionary*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly & Associates, and at <http://www.catb.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/> ; Also, anarcho-capitalism can be often critiqued on the basis that it employs Left rhetoric to advance Right policies. For a critique of the appropriation of (New) Left Rhetoric by *Wired* magazine in order to promote its own neoliberal agendas and views, see Barbrook, Richard and Cameron, Andy. 1996. The Californian Ideology, *Science as Culture*, number 26, volume 6 part 1, pp. 44-72, and at <http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/theory-californianideology.html> .

10 See Galbraith, John Kenneth. 1974. *The New Industrial State*. Penguin Books.

11 Holmes, Brian. 2004. The Spaces of a Cultural Question. *Multitudes*, Mars 22, an interview by Marion von Osten with Brian Holmes, at http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php3?id_article=1398 .

Or as Negri and Hardt bluntly put it:

“In the expression of its own creative energies, immaterial labor thus seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism”¹².

Respectively, by substituting immaterial labour with the Right's favourite adaptation of the term – knowledge work – we arrive at a similar syllogism. In the words of Richard C. Holloway it is made clear that *knowledge work* is of the kind that cannot be coerced:

“Knowledge workers are "hired knowers" rather than hands. Knowledge, as a commodity, is the only one that adds value for the seller as well as the buyer, and both get to keep it. As an added bonus, knowledge is mobile--it works just as well in one part of the world as another in a multitude of industries that need that particular knowledge. Employment relationships are considered as temporary, knowledge workers market their skills to the most attractive buyer”¹³.

This fondness to ascribe certain qualities, in particular a tendency toward autonomy, mobility, empowerment, and an innate capacity for self-rule and collective governance by the workers for the workers, to knowledge work is perhaps most vividly

12 Negri and Hardt 2001, p. 294. Of course, it is not the mere presence of the element of mobility that has led Negri and Hardt to this conclusion. What is more crucial and central to their conclusion is that, as they write, “generally, we can conclude that living labour is being organised within the enterprise independently of the capitalist demand...productive cooperation is posited as preceding and independent of the entrepreneurial function. Consequently, capital does not present itself as the organiser of labour force, but as registration and management of the autonomous organisation of the labour force. The progressive function of capital has been completed...living labour is organised independently of the capitalist organisation of labour...As a consequence, the figure of the entrepreneur is exhausted in activities that are increasingly more external and parasitic, which render the collective capitalist unable to interfere with the crisis” (Negri and Hardt, *The Labour of Dionysus*, p. 126, translated from Greek by the author). In short, productive cooperation and the enactment of production in social networks no longer require the mediation of the capitalist in order to be effectuated. Several theorists refer to this presupposition of post-industrial capitalism (which is a foundational characteristic of the contemporary mode of production) as the Communism of Capital.

13 URI: <http://www.learning-org.com/98.07/0212.html> .

encountered in the writings of the leading UK management guru, Charles Handy. In *The Empty Raincoat*, Handy describes the inner-workings of a media consultancy which when facing the prospect of an externally-initiated corporate suicide it suddenly realises that its most crucial asset is its employees and the knowledge they possess. All of a sudden then, its employees become self-aware of the power at their disposal and *en masse* proceed to resurrect the company simply by moving to new premises and re-baptising it under a different corporate eponym¹⁴. Elsewhere, he discusses the knowledge worker by reference to someone he once saw working inside a car, equipped with a laptop and a phone¹⁵.

Having achieved this degree of theoretical acceptance by proponents of the two major political sides on the Net, it should come as no surprise that the idea of immaterial labour is being celebrated by both Left and Right. The centrality of the element of mobility, of course, is evident from many vantage points. Besides, what is the difference between matter and im-matter when referring to the digital realm? The former cannot be propagated through the network (unless it is turned into 1s and 0s), while the latter is ideal for digital reproduction and network dissemination at negligible cost¹⁶.

We can now return to our analysis of the two workers who produce the same output, and, hence, they produce equal use (and exchange?) value, yet they receive different remuneration. Why is that so? Have we failed to take some important variable into account? Could the cost of life, which differs from one country to another, constitute that missing variable? If we suppose that living in America is much more expensive than living in Greece, which it is, and we reassure ourselves that this discrepancy in the cost of life is the differential factor responsible for determining the gap in the wage received by the two workers, then how could we still be maintaining that immaterial labour is oblivious to geography and that its quintessential characteristics overlap with those of global capital? Is not the logical extension of this argument an oxymoron? A paradox, which were we to accept as given, would force the idea of

14 Handy, Charles. 1995. *The Empty Raincoat: Making Sense of the Future*. London: Arrow Books.

15 Handy, Charles. 1989. *The Age of Unreason*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

16 However, by no means should this reproductive capacity, which is currently embedded in the functioning of digital technology, be interpreted in such a way as to express a discontinuity between physical (material) and intellectual (or cognitive) property. The moment we start distinguishing between physical and intellectual property, (whether or not based upon functional end-product characteristics, *i.e.* infinite reproducibility of mp3), is the moment we set the door open for metaphysics. And in this section of the essay I do not wish to deal with metaphysics. Intellectual property is property. And property, whether physical or intellectual, results from a production process in which a certain amount of labour is used as the main input. Hence, while at first glance it makes sense to treat them differently, intellectual property should nonetheless be examined by reference to the production process that produces it in the first place.

immaterial labour as the basis around which an autonomous class of labourers orbits to crumble hastily? Interestingly, Negri and Hardt glimpsed this, and scratched the surface of this problematic. To the extent that the tendencies toward the deterritorialisation of production and the increased mobility of capital proceed,

“...they place labor in a weakened bargaining position...network production can accommodate various old forms of non-guaranteed labor, such as freelance work, home work, part-time labor, and piecework”¹⁷.

In Negri's and Hardt's view, it should be noted, this is not really an oxymoron. Exactly the opposite. In the context of their analysis it serves to illustrate that immaterial labour often conflicts with the imperatives of global capital. In yet another passage, they recognise that immaterial labour takes on many forms and has several faces¹⁸, some of which are more susceptible to formal capitalist subsumption and centralised control in the tradition of Fordist mechanisation than others; a claim, which, as would be expected, is endorsed by other Left theorists too. The core of this argument is, as Chainworkers.org cluefully put it:

“cognitive workers are networkers, precarious workers are networked, the former are brainworkers, the latter chainworkers: the former first seduced and then abandoned by companies and financial markets, the latter dragged into and made flexible by the fluxes of global capital”¹⁹.

Obviously, there is no question whether the modes of production made possible by corporate-owned global telecommunication networks and infinitely reconfigurable supply chains that are being formed and disbanded at the push of a mouse button give rise to a new class of disenfranchised employees - this has been stressed before. At the same time that the contemporary system needs highly educated, IT-savvy labour to design and develop knowledge-rich innovative products and services, it also needs

17 Negri and Hardt 2001, p. 297.

18 *Ibid.* : pp. 290-294.

19 Quoted in Pasquinelli, Matteo. 2004. Radical machines against the techno-empire. From utopia to network. *Journal of Hyper(+)-drome.Manifestation*, Issue 1, September, at <http://journal.hyperdrome.net/issues/issue1/pasquinelli.html> .

cheap auxiliary labour to support the development of those value-added knowledge products and services at call centres and elsewhere where work content is still inexorably simplified as in the typical organisation under Fordism. But my objective is not to demonstrate that precarious and cognitive labourers co-exist at the intersections of network production. In this part of the essay, what I have set to explain is that cognitive labourers (and thus new media labourers) fall prey to a certain psychopathy that is fed by an ill-conceived notion of global equity and equivalence with none consideration given to geographic parameters, at least insofar as the wage regime is concerned. And yet, despite all those efforts so ably brought together by a good many commentators, immaterial labour, even in its more glorious incarnation, that of cognitive labour, is still amenable to forces reminding oneself of a game dialectic.

For if new media labour is still bound by the spatial dimensions of the fortified old economic construct, then any notion of immaterial labour as an autonomous force will have to be cast with radical scepticism. Though a sceptical economist might well counter that this phenomenon is, in fact, evidence of the beneficial effects brought about by globalisation to countries that, had not been for globalised network production, would suffer a comparatively higher rate of unemployment and their populations would be compelled to labour under extremely dysfunctional and coercive work conditions²⁰. This is certainly true. It does not, however, mean that those slaving away for unscrupulous firms (that have mastered and imported the art of outsourcing in the developing and third world) have achieved any noteworthy degree of autonomy, or that they are working under conditions comparable to what the Western world calls a decent working environment. Precarious new-media workers are simply better-off now when compared to their more dismal earlier circumstances. Faced with no practical alternative, I presume it is preferable to work long hours for little money than not to work at all and starve to death.

THE COMPLEMENTARY RULE OF CYBER GEOGRAPHY

But it is not just that good old geography still matters in the age of hegemony of immaterial labour - most importantly, cyberspace has superimposed a new geography on the already existent one, which is defined by access rather than space. As a thought-provoking online text points out²¹,

20 In *Up the Down Escalator*, Charles Leadbeater takes on this task with excess zeal.

21 Center for Digital Discourse and Culture, "From Analogue...to Digital Fordism", Virginia Tech. USA, at <http://www2.cddc.vt.edu/digitalfordism/2digdeterr.html>.

“cyberspace is almost entirely transversalized by capitalism, and it now mostly works to advance the universalization of markets. The axiomatics of commodification are quite congruent with those of digitalization, so metanational cyberspace emerges online as decoded flows of bits, money, ideas, labor, and products”.

The unidentified authors of this online study argue, and with good reason, that cyberspace is not merely put to the use of universalising consumer markets but it is also transforming the notion of a common labour market into one shaped not by geographic borders, but by access to cyber-networks. These networks, it has to be said, extend well beyond the provision of mere Internet connectivity - a role we usually associate with commercial entities known as Internet Service Providers (ISPs). They weave together their human and digital constituents in a spiral of connections (those connections could be also understood as relationships) that tangled as it is cannot be broken back into clearly defined parts²². This sheds light upon our analysis as it makes clear that the discrepancy in the wage received by the Greek Web developer and his American counterpart may indeed have nothing, or little, to do with the spatial dimensions of geography, but rather it can be explained by the spatial dimensions of (dis)connection (to cyber- networks), and the developers' respective capacity to forge and cement relationships with those gatekeeping and inhabiting those networks. To the evidence of this argument, in recent years all sorts of professional networks and communities have been popping up in cyberspace, some of which cater for the needs of specific professional branches (whose object is not and cannot yet be electronically simulated or rendered); others are focused upon a geographically-defined professional community; while yet other networks are more or less concerned with providing networking services to new media workers at large. Therefore, the reason the Greek Web developer receives less money could be because he is not well *connected*, or anyway not connected to the same networks his American counterpart is.

This perspective becomes all the more interesting to ponder when juxtaposed to the hypothesis that countries aspiring to occupy a favourable position in the global barometer of power (and control) should set as a top priority the implementation of an

²² Metaphorically speaking, the first gate one has to walk through when on the lookout for employment is electronic, but the job interviewer remains human. Or to employ a different metaphor, the road to work is cyber-paved, but the guardians of the road are still human.

efficient nationwide IT infrastructure²³. Long story short, if a country has an efficient and technologically up-to-date IT infrastructure in place, and this infrastructure is democratic in the sense of being readily available at no remarkable cost to as many people as possible, then the country, the argument goes, can seize all sorts of opportunities. Those opportunities may arise from a workforce, that IT-literate as it is, has developed a capacity to adapt to disruptive technological forces; from an explosion in the growth of domestic entrepreneurship in high-tech fields and information-based industries; from a population that is aware of where value is created in the post-industrial economy and so hedges its bets accordingly.

Could it thus be argued that the position the two Web developers occupy in the global fabric of network production, as well as the wage they receive, is effectively and single-handedly determined by the level of democratisation of telematic technologies that the countries they inhabit have assumed? This question opens a debate too long to be properly examined in the limited space of this essay. Suffice to say though that the concerns it raises are not unfounded for a number of reasons. First, for a Web developer who is located in an economically or technologically developing country has consciously chosen to be located in a geographic area far removed from where most opportunities for knowledge workers arise: in areas functioning as the meccas of the thriving cosmopolitan high-tech community, in places such as Cambridge in the United Kingdom, Silicon Valley, Cambridge, Mass., and New York in the United States. *Meatspace* and geographical proximity still matter; whether that is so for functional or spectacular reasons hardly makes any difference. Some companies may wish to keep an eye on their most valuable asset and thus those employed or hired by them have to be physically available for the occasional inspection tour. Other companies may operate on a strict compliance with a “I need to have met you in a face-to-face context” recruitment policy. Yet other companies may suspect that knowledge workers located in economically or technologically developing countries are relatively less motivated to become upwardly mobile, less interested in doing cutting-edge, around-the-clock work that will shape the future, and generally content with receiving less money for their labour. To a certain extent, all those assumptions hold. Being geographically attached to those cities around which knowledge workers coalesce still plays a role²⁴. Likewise, having access to those online networks around which knowledge workers aggregate enhances one's chances of finding employment.

23 See Friedman, Thomas L. 2000. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, Anchor Books ; and Novakovic, Gordana. 2004. Electronic Cruelty. *Journal of Hyper(+)drome. Manifestation*, Issue 1, September, at <http://journal.hyperdrome.net/issues/issue1/novakovic.html>.

24 See Bronson, Po. 2000. *The Nudist on the Late Shift and Other Tales of Silicon Valley*. Vintage.

SPECTACLE AS COMMODITY

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

--GUY DEBORD

To continue with the example of the two Web developers, *not all Websites are created equal, that is, not all Websites are developed in order to be used*. Some Websites, from the very moment of their inception, are designed to satisfy the needs of the spectacle, doomed to serve the interests of their image-driven masters with no consideration given to the Website's potential functionality.

The development of a Website, which, in my opinion, is the paradigmatic contemporary example of new media labour, but also of any other digital artifact that would fall into the new media umbrella for that matter, is often enacted on the understanding between the developer and the business entity commissioning that project that the final product of the developer's work will be geared toward the construction of an image. By that I do not mean that the goal of a Website is the fulfilment of marketing objectives, such as advancing an entity's or a professional's visibility or 'recognisability' through a neat Web presence. Nothing like that: a good many times, especially in geographic areas where cyber-literacy is extremely low²⁵, a Website is developed on the premise that the business-person represented by the Website will be able to boast its having a Website in his daily encounters with other business people. However, and this is crucial, the 'client' is not the least interested in how the actual Website will function, or even look aesthetically. Yet, on the other hand, the client is very much interested in how much the Website will cost. This factor has led to the emergence of a whole new class of Web developers who charge as little as possible, and whose clientele consists of people that will never visit their Website to see if it is still online unless somebody else who is persistent enough repeatedly asks them if their Website has disappeared for good from cyberspace; and since they are not really interested in communicating with any clients, suppliers, and collaborators via the Website, they are neither interested in attracting any new

25 That is largely the case in Greece – but I suspect in other countries too where Internet penetration and 'Net-literacy' is similar to that in Greece - where in my capacity as Internet consultant with a European Union initiative which aims at reinvigorating small and medium-sized entrepreneurship by encouraging and funding businesses to embark on the Internet) I have seen the development of hordes of 'business Websites' resulting in completely disfunctional and useless (for functional purposes, *ie.* making a sale, collaborating with suppliers, etc.) Websites.

clientelle; also, for much the same reason, they are not the least interested in the Website's functionality, and they often openly admit they cannot tell whether a Website is usable and functional for they have never tried to actually use a Website themselves; but what they do care for is to communicate a certain image, the image that the mere onwership of a Website affords a businessman in a spectacle-driven society. Usually, a single Webpage comprising a digitised photograph of the client (or a photo of the shop-window, facade, or interior of the office, etc.) along with a couple of lines of text, an address, an e-mail, and a telephone number will suffice.

This spectacular demand, of course, affects profoundly the entire immaterial labour market. For it forces a Web developer into the awkward position to either focus on satisfying the spectacular requirement for a *Website that is not* or to channel his creative energies into another line of work in order to make a living. In reality, this tension is never reconciled: the immaterial labour market in those cases is divided into two segments - the first segment is composed of Web developers who charge as little money as possible and who deliver as little as possible too, and the second segment consists of Web developers who do not succumb to this work ethic and hence are forced out of the mass market. As a result, a further labour market anomaly emerges: the ones who succeed in making a living from developing Webspaces are those who actually block the general public from understanding how (functional) Webspaces ought to be designed, developed, and used, whereas the other developers who refuse to develop *Websites that are not* are seen by the general public as eccentric and cunning amateurs who overcharge their clients for no apparent reason. At the end of the day, the general public remains disinformed as to the merits of having a full-fledged, functional Website, while a newly formed class of alleged knowledge workers profits from their ignorance to the dismay of honest and well-trained, yet unemployed, professionals. Armed with the zeal of those knowledge workers the spectale operationalises its demand for utter dysfunctionality and cyberspace accelerates the tendency toward the universalisation of the spectacle.

INTERLUDE

Up to this point, we have seen that that there are three main factors determining, to a certain extent, the discrepancy between the two Web developers: first, they may not be connected to the same (online) networks; second, their geographical whereabouts still assert a decisive influence upon the working conditions, remuneration included, they can ask and expect for; third, the product of their work may vary immensely as to its raison d'etre, due to the fact that one is developing a Website for functional

purposes (ie. the client wants to do business via the Website, and, thus, the Website has to be functional) while the other is developing a Website solely for spectacular reasons (ie. the client wishes to capitalise on the perceived image that an online presence affords a businessman in a country lacking the proper education required to employ a Website for functional reasons), and, thus, has no interest in ever using the Website; for that matter, he may not even care the least about the Website itself as long as he can boast his having a Website at all).

Also worth mentioning is that all three factors determining the discrepancy between the two Web developers are related to some sort of topology: the first factor is linked to cyber-geography whereas the second and third factors are linked to physical geography. Hence, a question asserts itself very forcibly: even in the unlikely case that the constraints (forced upon immaterial labour) which emanate from the rigidity of physical topology could be phased out, what about the newly erected constraints that emanate from the 'flexibility' of cyber geography? Why should anyone think that geography will not assert its primacy in cyberspace, albeit in a different form and with different rules?

Most importantly, new media labour, for all its superficial appeal to pundits, speculators, observers, and theorists of all colours and stripes is nothing but labour immersed into a constellation of activities whose common denominator is the prosthetic quality of technology expressed in liberating terms. However, apart from the prosthetic quality of technology, which cannot be refuted, the deus ex machina liberating effect, though embraced and cherished by so many commentators, still remains to be proven.

EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION, AND THE IMMATERIAL LABOUR MARKET

Science at the service of capital, commodity and spectacle is nothing but capitalised knowledge, fetishism of idea and method, distorted image of human thought. Pseudo-greatness of man, the passive knowledge of a meagre reality constitutes the magical justification for a tribe of slaves²⁶.

26 Translated from Greek by the author, based on Eduardo Rothe. *The Conquest of Space in the Time of Power*, in Alain Jaubert and Jean-Marc Levy-Leblonde (Eds.) (Auto)critique of Science. A slightly different translation by Paul Sieveking is given at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/conquest.html>

In stark contrast to the swiftly diminishing career prospects facing those in the Humanities who seek to enter the academia²⁷, would-be information-technology (IT) workers are reckoned to be privileged. Not only because not having a formal qualification is seen in certain IT circles as a badge of honour – indeed, it is the successful hacker's badge of honour²⁸ – but more importantly, because it is assumed that IT students are in the rare position of needing none and nothing, except for plenty of time perhaps, in order to acquire those skills and competencies that will later guarantee them a job in the epicentre of the most lucrative labour market. But this is yet another popular myth, in spite of its being contemplated by many computer scientists. In a time when the tools of the trade are not free (libre) and certainly not available free of charge, free time does not suffice. This becomes obvious when we take a look at the person who is constantly craving for fresh knowledge, in particular for knowledge that has been put to the service of capital by means of intensifying and imploding the wealth bondage that keeps unpaid-for labour hostage. For knowledge is power as Francis Bacon so convincingly proclaimed, but knowledge, despite widespread belief, is neither always free (libre) nor free of charge.

The cost of the investment in time required to pick up a new skill aside, what is left to the genuinely creative inquiring mind who wishes to navigate and internalise an external domain of knowledge, but who has no money to pay for it? This question becomes all the more relevant when inquiring into the mechanics of the labour market for cognitive workers specialising in all areas related to software engineering or tied to a specific software platform, may that be an operating system such as Solaris, or a graphical design tool such as *Adobe Photoshop*²⁹ and *Corel Draw*³⁰. Suppose I have no problem spending lots of time getting myself up to speed with *Adobe Pagemaker*³¹, *PersonalBrain*³², *Logic*³³, *Cubase*³⁴, *AutoCAD*³⁵ and other pieces of software made

27 See Kamenetz, Anya. 2004. “Wanted: Really Smart Suckers – Grad school provides exciting new road to poverty”, *The Village Voice*, April 27, at <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0417/kamenetz.php>.

28 A great number of prominent hackers-icons are university drop-outs. Bill Gates Jr. of Microsoft and Larry Ellison of Oracle are two of the more well known.

29 URI: <http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/main.html>

30 URI: <http://www.corel.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Corel3/Products/Display&pfid=1047024307335>

31 URI: <http://www.adobe.com/products/pagemaker/main.html>

32 URI: <http://www.thebrain.com/>

33 URI: <http://www.emagic.de/EN/index.html>

34 URI: http://www.steinberg.de/Category_sb4bd3-2.html

35 URI: <http://usa.autodesk.com/adsk/servlet/index?siteID=123112&id=2704278>

possible by incredible programming ingenuity, but I cannot afford to buy them. What do I do then? Do I abstain from using them as the result of my inadequate funding? Or do I resort to programming a real alternative myself (*ie. The GIMP*³⁶ *Vs. Adobe Photoshop*), hoping that in time this knowledge will compensate for the loss of familiarity in the use of the more mainstream tool which is the one valued by the market according to the particulars of the jobs currently advertised? Lots of people have done it in the past, and even more are doing it nowadays, chief among them Richard M. Stallman in his persistence and conscious realisation of the means he would have to employ to meet the ends he had set to pursue during his lifetime crusade for digital freedom. This attitude now takes a new dimension altogether as the condition of commodified knowledge has become inextricably linked to the emerging psychopathy of immaterial labour. When on the lookout for a knowledge-work kind of employment, one is inevitably confronted with interview questions along the lines of “what is your level of expertise in the use of Photoshop?” and blank CV fields that need to be filled in with corporate eponymies like *Cisco*³⁷ and brands/products like *SPSS*³⁸.

From this vantage point, *free software developers, illegitimate vendors of software, as well as people who crack software programs and give them away for free are located in the vanguard of the modern knowledge revolution*. On the other hand, and judging by their attitude toward software development and the so-called phenomenon of 'software piracy', the majority of them are unaware of their actions' real effect on the world of commodified knowledge. I say that for a number of reasons: for example, from my own first hand experience, and from accounts of others, it has occurred to me that a lot of software developers, free software developers included, even those that have yet to enter the labour market, are fiercely opposed to the phenomenon of piracy. They often, *wrongly*, equate software and music piracy since, as they believe, both pirated music and software is in digital form (and their being digital is, in effect, that which facilitates their illegitimate widespread availability). But unless one is a professional musician, and therefore needs to be exposed to as much music as possible for (professional) reasons that I need not elaborate on here, music is usually purchased for purposes other than making a living (or contributing to that). Whereas software of the kind discussed in the context of this paper is usually purchased in order to get a particular piece of work done, or for enhancing one's employability. Surely, using software is a pleasant thing for scores of people in the IT circle, yet the primary motivation for familiarising oneself with a software program rests on

36 URI: <http://www.gimp.org/>

37 URI: <http://www.cisco.com/>

38 URI: <http://www.spss.com/>

acquiring the skill which is associated with the software, rather than the intellectual satisfaction one derives from mastering the software itself. There are free software developers who criticise software piracy on the grounds that piracy diminishes the value of their own work³⁹. Obviously, those developers are the ones who study programming inside the confines of academia where all sorts of software, as if by magic, is widely and readily available. How about those developers who have never had the privilege and the opportunity to learn how to program at the university? Do they assume a similar perspective on software piracy? I have a good reason to believe they do not.

Same applies to illegitimate vendors of software. Most of them do not make any distinction between selling (pirated) music and (pirated) software for they only care for the revenue their activities will bring in, and they often deal in both music and software. However, without even glimpsing the actual effect of their actions, they contribute a strong blow to the world of commodified knowledge. For their clientele consists not only of illegitimate intermediaries who intend to copy the software they have bought from them a thousand times and re-sell it to others, but also of people who have a genuine interest in acquiring the knowledge embodied in the software. Not a very long time ago, I happened to stand right next to a *deal* in the process of becoming. The site was the famous agora of Monastiraki in Athens, Greece, located at the foot of the rock of Acropolis, where hundreds of small-time dealers set up shop every Sunday. The buyer had picked two or three CDs, one of which was a copy of *Avid*⁴⁰, and was negotiating the price for that software. In order to raise the price, I assumed for this is the only satisfactory explanation I can come up with, the dealer cunningly offered that this deal *is* illegal. To which the buyer replied: “I am doing nothing illegal here. I am not interested in re-selling this software. I only want it for the knowledge in it. And no one will stop me from acquiring knowledge”. The dealer, dazed a bit for it seemed he had not been given that particular reply on that day, nodded and agreed on the price the buyer had suggested. The deal took place, and in a moment's time the buyer had disappeared again into the crowd. The conscious realisation of the social effect of knowledge acquisition through 'illegitimate and clandestine channels', as exemplified by the determination shown by the above mentioned buyer to acquire the coveted knowledge by all means, even through his participation in a deal, seals the reversal of perspective: the perspective of power

39 For example, an argument commonly marshalled by free software developers (particularly developers and evangelists of the Linux operating system) is that the number of computer users who would otherwise consider switching to Linux is significantly decreased due to the fact that the proprietary operating system *Windows* (developed by Microsoft Corporation and sold as a commodity) is massively “pirated” and shared *free of charge* among computer users worldwide.

40 URI: <http://www.avid.com/>

through the technique of indoctrination it employs with the help of mass media has come into a conflict with the imperatives of knowledge acquisition, and the genuinely inquiring mind will assert its right to claim knowledge even in the obscene case that this process of knowledge acquisition has been criminalised. The primacy to establish *foundations for the advancement of illegal knowledge* can only be grasped on this plane: piracy is incorporated into the radical project of libre knowledge insofar as the *pirates* are seeking to extend their body of knowledge.

Similarly, crackers have been consistently portrayed by mass media as juvenile delinquents on the brink of a terminal mental collapse, whose kindest motivation can be explained by their vanity to demonstrate their skills to others. But this conceptualisation, though it illustrates the underlying motivation of some crackers, is far from adequate to explain the actions of all crackers. In *Cons in the Panopticon*, Indhu Rajagopal and Nis Bojin claim that cracking and piracy at large is the dialectical antithesis to the commodification of cyberspace through the corporate-led process of contraction of public spheres and 'creative commons' that once permeated cyberspace. To a certain extent, I agree with the authors of this paper that the sphere of cracked software is the antipode of the imminent expansion of the patent space and of the perpetual character of copyright law, which threaten to enchain the engines of creativity that would otherwise be accelerated by free cooperation and sharing online. But instead of discerning a force at work, according to which more 'protection' is bound to bring about more 'piracy' as its inevitable derivative in the age of plastic dissent, the practice of cracking envisages the most radical aspect of the project of libre knowledge: cracking does not stop at the boundary of illegal distribution – it goes much further than that. Crackers devote their time, energy, and skills to supplying the realm of illegal distribution with technology artifacts, and, not to forget, there is hardly ever any money for them. In effect, this critical aspect alone highlights the radicalisation of the cracker as a computer scientist put to the service of liberating knowledge from constraints imposed upon it by commodification.

THE EXPLOITATION OF VOLUNTEER AND UNPAID-FOR LABOUR: WHEN USING AND CONSUMING IS PRODUCING

If someone accepted to submit the culture industry system to wider historic perspectives, he would have to define it as the methodical exploitation of the ancient breach between people and their culture.

In *Free Labour: producing culture for the digital economy*, Tiziana Terranova asserts that free labour is endemic to informational-cognitive capitalism since cyberspace is, to a certain extent, synonymous with cognitive-informational capitalism and a large portion of cyberspace is developed by enthusiasts and generally by volunteers, that is, free labour⁴¹. That may well be true, yet it adds very little to a critical attempt to unveil how volunteer labour is exploited systematically for there is nothing wrong with people being empowered to homestead the noosphere that cyberspace as an organically growing, collective system of consciousness arguably is. On the contrary, one of the most empowering and democratic aspects of cyberspace is encapsulated in this precise capacity that one is able to build a virtual home with no need to ask for permission.

However, it should be not very hard to see that free labour is a requirement of the current configuration of cognitive-informational capitalism. There has never been a similar disruption in the number, and in the composition, of the unemployed population such as the one happening today. Nowadays, hordes of university graduates and PhDs, that is, knowledge workers, are joining the boundaryless 'industrial reserve army' that sustains the delicate balance that, in turn, restrains the contradictions of capitalism from exhausting capitalism itself. It is to the credit of thinkers like Antonio Negri to have formulated the theory of the internal margin, of how 'internal ghettos' are installed within over-developed regions and post-industrial metropolises in exactly the same time that under-developed and developing countries in the periphery are undergoing a process of heavy industrialisation in agriculture and commodity manufacturing⁴². The structural violence produced by capitalism has run amok, giving rise to such a (apparently permanent?) dislocation in the labour-force that no expansion in any sector of the economy will be able to absorb. And it is not likely that the historic amplification of capitalism will maintain its pace, or character, in order to cancel out the systemic shock triggered by the aggravation of the army of the unemployed. No previous generation faced the problem of unemployment to the extent that the current generation, (and the one after this), will be compelled to experience. It should not come as a surprise when the axiom of insanity will be bestowed upon those who, for one reason or another, are and remain jobless. Is this

41 Terranova, Tiziana. 2000. Free Labor: producing culture for the digital economy. *Social Text*, 63, Vol. 18, No. 2, Summer, pp. 33-58, at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/social_text/toc/soc18.2.html and http://www.uoc.edu/in3/hermeneia/sala_de_lectura/t_terranova_free_labor.htm.

42 Negri, Antonio. 1984. *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, ed. Jim Fleming, translated by Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano, South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey.

surge in the number of the unemployed, and the similarly pertinent shift in its composition toward increasingly more knowledge workers, likely to bring capitalism to a halt? Is this class revolutionary or counter-revolutionary? Such questions, inevitably, arise. To a certain extent, the unemployed constitute a singularity deeply embedded in the revolutionary subject. Yet, against this pressure, the system – apparently - does not break down. One could argue that the system feeds on the fragile circumstances of the unemployed, seizing whatever opportunity there is to utilise volunteer labour for spectacular goals by turning it into forced labour: tens of thousands of volunteers were the human motor behind the 2004 Olympic Games, which took place in Athens, Greece. Whereas some of those thousands of people surely volunteered because they wanted to volunteer - and there is absolutely nothing reprehensible in altruistic volunteer work - , others though volunteered in hope that, once the Olympic Games were over, they would find employment as personnel for the maintenance and operation of the sites that hosted the Olympic Games⁴³. This volunteer labour is conditioned by the structural violence of late capitalism. Said otherwise: the unemployed (and under-employed) are compelled to volunteer their labour if they wish to stand a chance of escaping unemployment.

Paradoxically, this peculiar lumpenproletariat is productive in that its volunteer labour is being appropriated and operationalised by commercial entities and spectacular priesthoods. In parallel, the unemployed are still needed as consumers, and are thus given social security cheques to ensure that the great circle of consumption will continue uninterrupted. Perhaps it would be easier to see how, and understand why, free labour is endemic to late capitalism if we think of *desire* and its function in an economic system premised on the value of appearance, which, cannot maintain its amplification, and thus turns inward, that is, commodifying shared lived experience and appropriating the knowledge previously held in common⁴⁴. In the age of universality of the spectacle, desire (for a particular commodity, power, image, experience, employment, etc.) is first engineered by corporate and political marketing departments, yet the propagation and diffusion of desire is effectuated mainly by 'ordinary people'⁴⁵. Exemplary here are (web)bloggers, this peculiar breed of netizens

43 As of the time of writing, no official statement has been issued (by the government, the state commission charged with the organisation and supervision of the Olympic Games, or the commercial entities involved) regarding how many of the volunteers have been employed at the sites that accommodated the 2004 Olympic Games. However, based on anecdotal evidence (that is, from accounts of volunteers who remain unemployed), this implicit promise has not yet materialised, and it remains uncertain if it ever will.

44 For example, farmers and indigenous people in many regions have painfully discovered that recipes, knowledges, and techniques that had been in common use for medical or agricultural purposes for centuries have now passed into the ownership of the global pharmaceutical complex in the institutionalised form of patents.

45 My analysis inevitably downplays the role played by 'different' kinds of people who are particularly

who complement traditional news outlets in usurping objective historical knowledge⁴⁶. As shared lived experience steadily becomes a commodity, and the concept of the spectacle is conceived to its full radicality, as a process of generalised social abstraction, unwaged labour is energised for distributing the desire for utter dysfunctionality and spectacular achievements. Said otherwise: as “we the people” become the media, we operationalise and rationalise the desire of the spectacle for mass social numbness without though being paid for so doing.

Perhaps, with the exception of (the gender-based division of) household labour, which remains the de facto model for recognising the appropriation of unwaged, supposedly un-productive labour in the social factory, and its centrality to social (re)production, the capitalistic exploitation of volunteer and unwaged labour has its origin elsewhere, notably in the rise of the culture industry. In their pioneering critique of the culture industry written more than half a century ago, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer asserted that the mode of entertainment offered through televised images aims at subsuming the masses under a vagrant cultural ethic, forcing them subconsciously to grow socially apathetic through a repetitive tele-diet of intellectual atrophy and mental paralysis⁴⁷. Television, they wrote, is the socio-cultural equivalent of fordist production, a carefully crafted technique of hypnotism designed to install a taylorist consciousness into one's mind, thereby (re)producing workers incapable of ever asking for anything more than a world in fragments, unable to do any work that is not broken into pieces. Writes Adorno: “the culture industry does not adjust to the reactions of the customers, but it forges them. It trains them to these reactions, acting

charismatic when it comes to spreading ideas and influencing the masses and as such should be the main focus of entrepreneurs in their effort to develop and plan the diffusion of an ideavirus. For further information about those peculiar individuals and how to make use of them, see Geoffrey Moore's *Crossing the Chasm* (Moore's classic “Technology Adoption Life-Cycle” distinguishes between *Innovators*, *Early Adopters*, *Early Majority*, *Late Majority*, *Laggards* and offers advice on how each group should be dealt with), Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell identifies three particular kinds of individuals - *Connectors*, *Mavens* and *Salespeople* - who play a decisive role on the potential success or failure of any given product, service, process or idea) and Seth Godin's *Unleashing the Idea Virus* (Godin suggests that *Promiscuous Sneezers* and *Powerful Sneezers*, depending on how they are approached and dealt with by the company, are the two groups that will either transform a business idea into a staggering commercial success or make sure it sinks into oblivion and notoriety).

46 Of course, it would be silly to claim that all bloggers are would-be Spectacle-authors, or that they blog for the same reasons. In fact, in many ways, the sphere of blogging envisages the most potent element in the struggle for anti-spectacular analysis and news coverage. It is my conviction that one can be informed more adequately by filtering information through the abyss of weblogs than by relying on media conglomerates and mass media in general. And this is precisely because most bloggers do not assume an (pseudo)objective stand toward the news and opinions they publish; it is their being subjective that makes them far more useful and valuable (as sources of information and commentary) than the pseudo-objective spectacular mass media.

47 Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso, Ch. 4, and at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/adorno.htm>

as if it [the culture industry] is a customer itself. Someone could suspect that the whole arrangement, to which itself [the culture industry] assures it abides by, is ideology...Its method is to anticipate the mimicry of its self by the spectator-listener and to show as already pre-existing the consent it wishes to achieve'⁴⁸. In Adorno's and Horkheimer's view, the kind of cultural entertainment mediated by television only furthers the goals of the capitalist system, effectively extending the logic of fordist capitalism beyond the factory floor to spheres that were until then intact by commodification and the division of labour. With the aid of television, capitalism transplanted its logic to the realm of culture, turning consumers of TV programming into a new breed of divided labour, one that stands apart for being valued and exploited both inside and outside the factory. Those users/consumers, under the spell of television, as it were, would be steadily and gradually deprived of any will to question and revolt against a dehumanising, mind-numbing mode of work.

Fast forward sixty years. Press return. Has the situation changed a bit? Yes, by an order of magnitude, no doubt. Today, even the least cynical of TV spectators should have disposed of any fleeting belief in that specific medium's educational and informative character. But in spite of our having been made more aware and vigilant by virtue of this perspective, the dialectic of exploitation that Adorno and Horkheimer depicted still persists. In fact, one could seriously ponder the thought that this dialectic has become remarkably more diffuse, further creeping into the terrain of interactivity and peer production-consumption. In the deeply unsettling *Reluctant Revolutionaries – the false modesty of reformist critics of copyright*, Johan Söderberg exposes the new face of capitalist appropriation. In the hyped-up interactive paradigm we are nowadays bestowed and wrapped up with, Söderberg maintains, surplus value is realised through a reversal of sorts: now the users and consumers are the ones whose labour is frantically sought by the engines of capitalism for surplus value is extracted precisely from that unpaid-for input⁴⁹. This claim, goes, nonetheless, very well known among proponents and prophets of the digital revolution. In *Digital Capital*, Don Tapscott writes affirmatively that “even the very definition of employee will change as some customers and suppliers begin to spend more time in the company than will some of the company's own workers”⁵⁰. Tapscott, however, is not in the least concerned about how those 'employees' will be remunerated. Indeed, this stand is reminiscent of a good

48 Adorno, Theodor. 2000. *Minima Moralia*. Translated by Λευτέρης Αναγνώστου. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αλεξάνδρεια, #129, translated from Greek by the author.

49 Söderberg, Johan. 2004. Reluctant Revolutionaries: the false modesty of reformist critics of copyright, *Journal of Hyper(+)drome.Manifestation*, Issue 1, September, at <http://journal.hyperdrome.net/issues/issue1/Söderberg.html>

50 Tapscott, Don *et al.* 2000. *Digital Capital: Harnessing the Power of Business Webs*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, p.17.

many futurist and elite consultant in favour of laissez-faire economics. Issues of remuneration aside, it was only a matter of time for commercial entities to turn to volunteer and unwaged labour in order to satisfy the demands of a global consumer market addicted to ever faster upgrades and supposedly massively-customised products and services.

As regards to cyberspace, while some punters restrain themselves to experimenting with ‘high-tech gift culture marketing’⁵¹, other commercial organisations infamously regard people who voluntarily contribute their time and effort to the online communities they belong to as free labour, but, nonetheless, subject to express delegation of command and control.

Online community companies, from GeoCities to iVillage, are supported by volunteers who spend their free time maintaining the communities they love. But, paradoxically, the companies are also profiting from the work those volunteers put into the communities. Does that mean that the volunteers should be reimbursed for their efforts? Are the volunteers, in fact, slaving away as unpaid community employees?⁵²

Central to the debate is America Online (AOL) and its ‘community leader’ scheme according to which thousands of volunteers contribute their time to organising and maintaining their electronic neighbourhood and helping newcomers in return for free access to the AOL system. Regardless of the commercial value that these volunteers add to the ‘community’, AOL’s programme backfired⁵³ and disgruntled community leaders flocked away from AOL to create their own corporate – free online

51 *High-tech gift culture marketing*’s proposition is best summarised as follows: “Dig deep and give. Give until people perceive you as engaging in a Net-centric act of selflessness. Then sell ‘em the movie rights, the t-shirts, the action figures and the baseball caps. They’ll buy. And you will have done something positive for the Internet” (Sterne, Jim. 1996. *The Internet Gift Culture*, *Web Master Magazine*, November, at <http://www.targeting.com/Gift-Culture.html>).

52 Brown, Janelle. 1999. “Must AOL Pay “Community Leaders?”, *Salon*, April 16, at http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/1999/04/16/aol_community/

53 “Former volunteers have a range of complaints about the volunteer program, most of which involve the feeling that they were mistreated by AOL. Some complain about having been summarily removed from AOL when they criticized the system; others protest that they were forced to follow draconian rules and non-disclosure agreements. Kelly Hallissey, a former AOL community leader explains that “how AOL treats their volunteers is not how you treat volunteers: You can’t shove a gazillion rules down their throat, then yell at them and fire them when they disagree.”” (Brown, Janelle. 1999. “Must AOL Pay “Community Leaders?”, *Salon*, April 16, at http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/1999/04/16/aol_community/).

communities elsewhere.

The problem concludes Janelle Brown has nothing to do with volunteerism or community leaders, and everything to do with specific commercial organisations' attitude towards 'community'. Chris Werry takes this argument a step further and criticises multi-level marketing practices⁵⁴ employed by commercial organisations that aim at mobilising volunteers as free marketers as "this tends to skew community formation and the production of online resources in ways that are aligned with corporate interests, rather than public or community interests"⁵⁵. There is abundant evidence that this was the driving force behind the gradual collapse of so many online communities that either started as non-commercial projects and then moved on to becoming for-profit organisations such as happened with the *Amsterdam Digital City*, or had been commercially focused from the head start but failed to realise profits despite widespread enthusiasm such as in the case of *Electric Minds*⁵⁶. The problem is that corporate interests and most importantly their enforcement within the community space may alienate members and utterly shatter the community.

Another recent addition to the debate is Orkut, a by-invitation only online community that is affiliated with Google, and which provides networking services to a plethora of knowledge workers. All rights to the information one inserts and stores into the Orkut universe automatically pass into the hands of Orkut in the form of intellectual property, as explicitly stated in Orkut's *Terms and Conditions*⁵⁷. Practical considerations may have dictated this seemingly authoritarian policy, however, Orkut's decision to move beyond using to owning the contributions of end-users, who, we should remind ourselves, provide Orkut's content, points to a future when a swathe of information posted on the Internet will be exploited commercially by for-profit entities whereas the ones who have contributed this information in the first place will be in no position to claim ownership over any of their input, therefore, being unable to

54 For example, Geocities encouraged its members to create links from their home pages to Geocities corporate pages; a practice that was pioneered by Amazon.com and came to be known as affiliate marketing.

55 Werry, Chris. 1999. Imagined Electronic Community: Representations of Virtual Community in Contemporary Business Discourse, *First Monday*, Issue 4, No 9, at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue4_9/werry/index.html

56 For an extensive discussion of the Digital City of Amsterdam (DDS), see ReindeR Rustema's doctoral thesis *The Rise and Fall of DDS* (November 2001, University of Amsterdam) and the very elaborate list of DDS-related documents, essays, etc., that he has collected at <http://reinder.rustema.nl/dds/>; also see Geert Lovink's *The Digital City – Metaphor and Community* in Lovink, Geert. 2002. *Dark Fiber - Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, Cambridge/ London: The MIT Press, pp. 42-67. Regarding Electric Minds, see its founder's, Howard Rheingold's, reflections entitled "My experience with Electric Minds", *Nettime*, February 1, 1998, at <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9802/msg00004.html>

57 URI: <http://www.orkut.com/terms.aspx>

use it themselves lest they ever felt like re-using it.

But the appropriation and exploitation of volunteer and unwaged labour is nowhere felt more strongly than in the sphere of free software/open source software (FS/OSS) development. Bluntly put: a swathe of software programmers, especially those who are unemployed, resort to developing FS/OSS, for they hope their involvement with free software will enhance their prospects of finding employment later on. For scores of people who seek employment in the IT industry, it is the vanity of the CV that which drives them to work for free on free software⁵⁸. Yet, the fruits of their volunteer labour are appropriated by commercial enterprises that capitalise on FS/OSS, and it is highly dubious whether these “volunteers” are ever rewarded for their contribution to the profit-making machine.

FREE SOFTWARE AND OPEN SOURCE: THE PYRRIC VICTORY OF IMMATERIAL LABOUR

The sphere of free software and open source software (FS/OSS) is perhaps the most apocalyptic of all the parables and symbolic stories of digital democracy heralding the beginning of a new era of network production. FS/OSS is the template through which the psychopathy inflicted upon immaterial labour first traverses before spiralling further down to the abode of network production. The influence of its paradigm permeates the entire vortex of network production into which immaterial labour is drawn. And its power rests upon its rather flexible development methodology which when put to use by a globally dispersed network of software coders is capable of producing such magnificent and formidable fragments of programming ingenuity such as the Linux kernel, the Apache HTTP Server, and the Perl scripting language. FS/OSS, though it defines the core of the digital condition as a copy-and-paste lifestyle in a world plunged in the reassuringly persistent hope among cyberians that the fundamental property of digital matter hinges upon its complete disregard for the laws governing physical matter and its brutal onslaught on the socio-economic rationale that sustains property and exchange relations in the old tainted world of

58 Of course, that is not to say that all free software and open source (FS/OSS) development takes place because of a system of economic incentives. Having said that, for three excellent treatises on the issue of motivation in FS/OSS development, which link developers' motivation directly to market forces and economic incentives, see Lancashire, David. 2001. The Fading Altruism of Open Source Development, *First Monday*, volume 6, number 12, December, at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_12/lancashire/; Lerner, Josh and Tirole, Jean. 2000. "The simple economics of Open Source", National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper, number 7600 (March), at <http://www.hbs.edu/research/facpubs/workingpapers/papers2/9900/00-059.pdf>; and Rothfuss, Gregor. 2002. *A Framework for Open Source Projects*, Master's Thesis, University of Zurich, at http://greg.abstrakt.ch/docs/OSP_framework.pdf.

scarce resources, conceals the crippled worldview of a good many knowledge worker who develops software in anticipation of a world revolution in the making, or at least, of a project of world domination unfolding through an elit operating system – the most apt metaphor of the global brain connecting humans and machines, only overshadowed by the network of the networks, that is, the Internet. Part of the crippled worldview, which could be simply described as the tragic belief in employing technology to abolish politics and economics altogether⁵⁹, stems from the fact that FS/OSS is neither myth nor representation nor simulacrum. FS/OSS when reduced to its fundamental technological properties, that is, divorced from its ideological billings, is very *real*. And this is why it liquefies the psychopahy of immaterial labour – it demonstrates that talent and co-operation make capital dance; **it offers a real-world demonstration of how the new emancipated society will be organised**. Linux – the most celebrated of all FS/OSS accomplishments – has shown in staggeringly little time that capital and (spectacular) hierachy can be done away in developing such a complex and sophisticated piece of software, which until recently was reckoned to be impossible to produce in a massively decentralised work setting shunning conventional yardsticks of engineering success⁶⁰. The hierarchy of Linux, if it can be said to be a hierarchy at all since command-and-control is literally absent, is based on merit, rather than status. Leaders are selected by the community on the basis of their involvement and contribution, and the process of decision-making is transparent and democratic, assuming a global community of developers as the ultimate stakeholder⁶¹. On these premises, FS/OSS radiates the impression that the time has come for a new class of workers whose creative endeavours and their passion for autonomy will

59 Linus Torvalds has argued (half-jokingly perhaps?) that Linux is his project toward world domination, yet elsewhere he has argued he's just an engineer and refuses to allow non-technical (political) issues and debates to affect any decisions pertaining to the development of the technological manifestation-implementation of his vision, that is, the Linux kernel. See Torvalds, Linus. 1999. The Linux Edge in Dibona Chris, Ockman Sam and Stone Mark (Eds.) *Open Sources: Voices from the Open Source Revolution*, Sebastopol: O'Reilly & Associates, and at <http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/linus.html> ; and the relevant post by Linus Torvalds to the Linux Kernel mailing list where he argues "I'm an "Oppenheimer", and I refuse to play politics with Linux" and "I'm just an engineer" is archived at <http://marc.theaimsgroup.com/?l=linux-kernel&m=105115686114064&w=2>.

60 Despite the fact that an operating system is supposed to be developed only by a closely-knit team to avoid rising complexity and communication costs of coordination (a principle of software engineering commonly referred to as Brooks's Law after Fred Brooks, a software manager with IBM, who was the first to state that "the complexity and communication costs of a (software) project rise with the square of the number of developers, while work done only rises linearly"), Linux is being developed in a massively decentralised mode under no central planning, an amazing feat given that it has not evolved into chaos. For a thorough discussion of Brooks's Law, see Brooks, Fred. 1975. *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

61 See Dafermos, George N. 2001. Management and Virtual Decentralised Networks: The Linux Project, *First Monday*, volume 6, number 11, November, at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_11/dafermos/

catalyse new decentralised structures in the new media sector, forcing increasingly more sectors of the economy to follow suit, to subscribe to its paradigm as the ruthless pace of digitisation blasts the world free from constraints imposed by the rigidity of production models tuned in for the manipulation of physical matter.

This story has been told a thousand times. What has not been told that many times is that for all those students developing FS/OSS as part of their university assignments and in their leisure time, there are as many developers hard at work customising FS/OSS for the in-house needs of their employers' systems, and doing their part in the great chain of outsourcing that spans the world. Porting Linux to some antiquated, obsolete system, that none could be bothered about except for the company managers who find this a good idea to save money and test their employees' dedication and enthusiasm does not seem to echo the cry for meaningful work. And those developers labouring hard at an Indian sweatshop, trying to meet the deadline forced upon them by an overseas firm, would find the idea that FS/OSS development is liberating and empowering very hard to believe. **Fact of the matter is FS/OSS is inextricably connected to a constellation of capitalist directives, commercial agendas, and economic incentives**⁶².

What is even more disturbing is that the role of intellectual property shifts, by an order of magnitude, toward the regulation of immaterial labour⁶³. Indicatively, *IBM has a patent on how to employ and retain FS/OSS developers*, which means that in an insane world anyone who has ever written a single line of HTML would have to get IBM's permission to work at any company other than IBM⁶⁴. Therein emerges a contradiction that FS/OSS is incapable of dodging, at least for the time being: given that the time is ripe for the systematic exploitation of immaterial labour, and draconian intellectual property regimes orchestrate the production process in accordance with the exclusive interest of massive intellectual property holders, the idea that radical subjectivity is being produced in networks of collaborative FS/OSS development is thrown into insignificance. Said otherwise: the global intellectual property law apparatus has both the power to operationalise FS/OSS for the benefit of its master – the cultural-industrial complex, and, most crucially, to render it illegal lest such a course of action is deemed necessary. In the latter case, in which FS/OSS developers are marginalised, and networks of collaborative FS/OSS development are effectively forced into the computer underground, there is a good possibility that the subversive character of FS/OSS will re-surface, but nobody can tell with any degree of

62 See footnote #48.

63 See Söderberg 2004.

64 *Ibid.*, endnote #38 at http://journal.hyperdrome.net/issues/issue1/Söderberg.html#_ftn38

certainty whether its subversive motors are sufficiently equipped to deal with a world pompously indoctrinated to the advantages of a draconian intellectual property regime.

Perhaps we could further our understanding by looking into FS/OSS through the prism of motivation: why people develop FS/OSS in the first place, and under which (social, economic, etc.) conditions tend people to develop FS/OSS. In taking a critical look at the intersections of free software anthropology and economics, and far beyond them, David M. Berry argues that free software production is sustainable only insofar as the necessary labour force - the real motor - has divorced itself from the level of necessity, that is, economic subsistence⁶⁵. But if this is true, and this is very likely, then it also means that the field of emancipation from waged labour is accessible only to those lucky ones with whom history has been so kind as to offer the opportunity to be located exclusively in the Western World and within its upper social strata⁶⁶. But this vision is far from global in its communicative reach: surely aristocratic and principally ethical, yet confined to only a small segment of the global-population, for which the real significance (and telos – in that regard, it is more of a consequence as well as a final purpose) of the passage to the hegemony of immaterial labour consists either in the increasingly indefinite division between work time and leisure time, or in the (almost static?) liberation from labour, that is, the relative increase of leisure time that society has been affording an increasing number of people. Evidently, there is no communicative action to be accomplished universally and totally here; this Logos cannot traverse the world from one side to the other, for the circumstances of people outside of the small segment that can afford to think of a society liberated from labour are so heavily burdened with labour-intensive activities-duties, that effectively exclude them from contemplating Technotopia. For, aside from nanotek fancies fulfilling the simultaneous prophecy and curse of the affluent consumer society, this vision can only be realised by people who either have, chiefly, lots of free time to devote to the pursuit of their passions, or, who cannot tell if their coding free software can be classified as work or fun. For the former, it is very likely that “the present “liberation from labor”, the increase of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor,

65 Berry, David M. 2005. Free as in “Free Speech” Or Free as in “Free Labour”? A Philosophical Enquiry Into Free Culture. *Free Software Magazine*, Issue 3, April, at http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com/free_issues/issue_03/free_labour/.

66 That free software/open source software (FS/OSS) development takes place worldwide – it is indeed a global phenomenon - rather than a work ethos restricted solely to the Western World, is perhaps its most potent characteristic for it demonstrates that the new emancipated society, as well as the new paradigm of organisation of production, can be realised globally, regardless of geo-political differences and regional idiosyncracies. And that is why the thesis that “free software production is sustainable only insofar as the necessary labour force - the real motor - has divorced itself from the level of *necessity*, that is, economic subsistence” directly contradicts the emancipatory potential of FS/OSS: for it negates the global character of FS/OSS.

nor a liberation from the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity lost in labor can be regained in the submission to its result”⁶⁷.

Then, perhaps, the question we should pose is if this perspective ever becomes revolutionary: hypothetically, it could effect radical change when the tendencies of immaterial labour reach their full potential, that is, when schematised and crystallised into a coherent whole that is dominant in both qualitative and quantitative terms: not when immaterial labour asserts its hegemony through the value it generates for cognitive-informational capitalism – which is where we stand now –, but when the entire labour force will be absorbed in the production of immaterial products, and sign values⁶⁸. But, as Constantine George Caffentzis argues compellingly in *The End of Work or the Renaissance of Slavery?*, this projection into the future is lacking in evidence: “There is no evidence from the total history of capitalism that there is only a linear progression that ends with the last service worker”⁶⁹. But even if this mere speculation comes true, this is hardly sufficient to guarantee that all of society will discard its obsession with necessity. We should not forget that there is a possibility, and it is a very good one, that despite the level of advancement that the forces of production have or will ever attain, emancipation from labour will not be complete. The truly Affluent Consumer Society cannot exist, as, on the one hand, it is primarily a consumerist Utopia, and thus its code-abiding citizens ought to consume (but they do not have to work!), but, on the other hand, all of life in it still seems to hinge upon surpluses and deficits (*ie.* think, for example, of desires and cravings: how they are engineered, circulated, accumulated, and consumed), and thus labour is still required in order to produce the signs that desire, in turn, will feed on. In Technotopia, perhaps you can have what you desire (instantly and automatically?), but once you have it, you will no longer desire it. And by that time a new desire will have taken its place, soliciting your attention and urging you to indulge. But this circular process needs ammunition, that is, labour. And labour, by definition, goes hand in hand with necessity: it should not be surprising that the greek word for labour and slavery is the same (δουλειά – δουλεία). As Debord remarked, “to the extent that necessity is socially dreamed, the dream becomes necessary”⁷⁰. It is wrong to assume that FS/OSS

67 Debord, Guy. 1983. *Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Fredy Perlman *et al.*, Detroit: Black & Red, #27, and at http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/pub_contents/4.

68 Of course, this opens up a different problematic: it still excludes free and volunteer labour from the analysis, as well as non-waged work done inside the social factory.

69 Caffentzis, Constantine George. 2003. *The End of Work or the Renaissance of Slavery? A Critique of Rifkin and Negri*, in Bonefeld, Peter (Ed.) *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics*, New York: Autonomedia, and at <http://journal.hyperdrome.net/issues/issue2/caffentzis.html>.

70 Debord 1983, #21.

is an adaptation to abundance, rather than scarcity⁷¹. For not only programming skills and time obviously are not abundant, but even in the case that they were abundant this need not mean that the dogma of necessity would not persevere.

As regards to the latter category of people for whom the boundaries between play and work are blurred, says Slavoj Žižek:

“Exemplary here are the “postmodern” hackers – programmers, those extravagant eccentrics hired by large corporations to pursue their programming hobbies in an informal environment...they thus seem to realise a kind of proto-Socialist utopia of overcoming the opposition between alienated business, where you earn money, and the private hobby-activity that you pursue for pleasures at the weekends...the result is that one is exposed to a superego pressure incomparably stronger than that of the good old “Protestant work ethic”. Therein resides the unbearable paradox of this postmodern “disalienation”: the tension is no longer between my innermost idiosyncratic creative impulses and the Institution that doesn't appreciate them or wants to crush them in order to “normalize” me...What we are dealing with here is thus a strange alliance between the rebellious subversive core of my personality, my “imp of perversity”, and the external Corporation”.⁷²

What strange world reveals itself when fun and play are summoned to the bidding of the Corporation, and thus subsumed under cognitive-informational capitalism?

THE NEW DIALECTIC OF PLAY

Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and of the

71 See Raymond, Eric S. 2001. *The Cathedral & the Bazaar: Musings on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolutionary*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly and Associates, and at <http://www.catb.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/>; and Kuwabara, Ko. 2000. Linux: A Bazaar at the Edge of Chaos, *First Monday*, volume 5, number 3 (March), at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue5_3/kuwabara/.

72 Žižek, Slavoj. 1998. *The Spectre Is Still Roaming Around*. An Introduction to the 150th Anniversary Edition of The Communist Manifesto. Zagreb: Bastard Books. pp. 39-40.

body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism.

-- MARSHALL McLuhan

In Douglas Rushkoff's recent work one frequently meets the implicit hope that juvenile videogame players, when they come of age, will assume a different attitude toward many things the previous generation accepted as given and never bothered to question as to their social legitimacy. It is thus hoped that this generation of joystick capitalists and social hackers, having learnt from game-playing to look for way-outs and parallel or alternative solutions where none seemed to exist, will search for and discover new ways to incubate a mass culture of curiosity in which tinkering with the underpinning principles of political, social, and economic organisation is massively encouraged⁷³. But this optimistic voice has been heard before. From Johan Huizinga's and Marshall Sahlins's belief in the innate capacity and desire of human beings to organise and structure life around play and playfulness⁷⁴ to the protean consciousness proposed by Robert Lifton as a coping mechanism structured around the many personas and avatars that nowadays younger people 'dress themselves with' in order to accommodate the demands being placed upon them in a time where one is always-on and always-connected to different communities, play has been offered as the only fix capable of injecting some vital versatility, harmony, and equilibrium into our turbulent, laden with anxiety, overburdened lives⁷⁵. However, this hope for liberation and harmony through play is not only limited to the scope of one's free time, but it extends well beyond it to the work shift.

I have come across a good many Web developer saying half-jokingly that developing a Website is half real work and half play⁷⁶. Or half art, half work, whatever. But if play and fun consists in spouting out, churning out line after line, frame after frame, template after template, Website after Website, hour after hour, day after day, and weeks go by, then I am sorry but I cannot see how this can be much of a funny or empowering line of work. Yes, there are Web developers on the payroll of creative

73 Rushkoff, Douglas. 2004. *Open Source Democracy*. Demos, at <http://www.rushkoff.com/downloads/opensourcedemocracy.pdf>

74 Sahlins, Marshall. 2003. *Stone-Age Economics*. Routledge; Huizinga, Johan. 1971. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Beacon Press.

75 Lifton, Robert J. 1993. *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation*. NY: Basic Books.

76 Characteristically, in a *Hotwired* interview in 1998, Gregor Rothfuss, a Web developer who sits at the board of the OSCOM (central organisational for Open Source Content Management), when asked what he liked the most about the Net, he replied: "The very fine borders between serious work and play when you design a Web site". <http://hotwired.wired.com/members/98/05/geek0a.html>

agencies whose work content is nothing but creative. Developing ten nearly identical Websites per day can be seen as a creative thing to do only in a very twisted, pathetic, and ironic way. Developing a Website for oneself, as a personal project kind of, with no employment contract involved, could be fun, I suppose. So, too, would being a Web developer with CICV⁷⁷, working inside a refurbished old castle in rural France, on a project commissioned by a commercial organisation which is demanding nothing less and nothing more than an innovative Website, no strings attached, under the spiritual leadership of a world renowned digital art connoisseur like Bongiovanni. At CICV, whose raison d'être is to explore and accelerate the convergence of creative art and digital lifeforms, work consists in researching, and research consists in working. And both should be geared at exploring new ground, doing something that has not been done before, building technology artifacts that none has dared to build before. But there are no job definitions at CICV. Everyone working there is an artist. Dreams and fantasy worlds, like the CICV universe, do indeed exist in real life. And real people are being paid real money to work (or play) there. But unfortunately dreams and fantasy worlds do not last forever. CICV has recently bitten the dust, a deceased research centre, once buzzing and steaming with life, now left to decay⁷⁸. What is the moral of this story? Maybe the death of CICV will serve as a symbolic death, a symbolic manifestation of the practicalities (or contradictions) inscribed in the daily practice of coding for a living. Waged Web developers can hardly be "artists". Or anyway most of the times when they choose to function as artists, they cannot expect to be making a decent wage. Choose your life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a mortgage payment. Or choose art and autonomy instead. But if that is what you choose, then you might as well have known better. For real art and autonomy, that is, of the complete and absolute kind (which, said otherwise, is not reducible to the product of one's labour, but, rather, can only have a meaning in the context of the way one leads his or her whole life), have little to do with commodified work (in fact, they have nothing to do with any kind of work, since work, if conceived in its purest form, consists in the artificial and forced rotation of life about the dual axis of production-consumption).

And despite all this, the search for inner meaning through play and playfulness is alive and kicking wherever one turns to. The hope is still kept alive. Increasingly, in the business and management literature, employees are being portrayed as soccer players, and managers are being re-conceptualised as coaches. The market, once referred to as

77 URI: <http://www.cicv.fr/>

78 See Rivoire, Annick. "Art Digital: le CICV effacé du disque dur", *Libération*, July, 22, 2004. <http://www.liberation.fr/page.php?Article=225391>

the battlefield, is now understood through images of green football fields⁷⁹. Weird? Interesting? Perhaps. Nowadays, businesses reinvent themselves and their work environments to become more pleasant to their players. Kodak, in Rochester, New York, has a 'humor room' packed with toys, videos, and all sorts of games to keep its players well entertained⁸⁰. Such stories abound. And every single one of them points to one direction: commercial entities, if they wish to remain alive in today's ultra-volatile environment by attracting and retaining the human capital required to make this wish come true, should reinvent themselves and work inside them along the lines of play and art. The title of Joseph Pine's and James Gilmore's hugely influential business book *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* speaks for itself. Pine and Gilmore advocate that corporations should be run like theatrical performances, with scriptwriters, directors, producers, and performers substituting for workers, managers, planners, and shareholders. The new concept of work is defined through shiny stories and glossy metaphors made to fit with the post-industrial reality in which every business, if it is to survive, ought to be run like a *showbiz*⁸¹. And plenty of management academics and superstar consultants, from Malone and Laubacher⁸², Kao⁸³, Powell⁸⁴, and Evans and Wurster⁸⁵ to Joel Kotkin⁸⁶, are telling us that Hollywood is now the de facto organisational model for running a business the right way. Even Andy Grove, former chairman of Intel, has likened the modus operandi of the software industry to the way theatrical and Hollywood productions are being put together⁸⁷. But make no mistake, the *hollywoodisation* of business and the alleged reinvention of work around theatre and play is often misleading for it represents only one side of the coin that knowledge workers are tossing, unaware of the darker side that hides beneath.

Had he been alive to witness all this, Herbert Marcuse would have shot himself in the face. What once Marcuse⁸⁸ defined as antithetical to work and productivity is now

79 Nonaka, Ikujiro. 2001. Synthesizing Capability: A Key to Create a New Reality, September 11, at <http://itnnet.cba.hawaii.edu:82/Nonaka.ppt>

80 Kao, John. *Jamming: the Art and Discipline of Business Creativity*. NY: Harper-Collins, 1996, pp.66-67.

81 See Peters, Tom. 1994. *Liberation Management*. Pan.

82 Laubacher, Robert J. and Malone, Thomas W. 1998. The Dawn of the E-lance Economy, *Harvard Business Review*, September.

83 Kao 1996.

84 Powel, Walter W. Neither Market Nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization, *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 12 (1990): 296-326

85 Evans, Philips and Wurster, Thomas. 1999. *Blown to Bits: how the new economics of information transforms strategy*. Harvard Business School Press.

86 Kotkin, Joel and Friedman, David. "Why Every Business Will Be Like Show Business", *Inc.*, March 1995, p.66.

87 Cited in Owen, Geoffrey and Kehoe, Louise. "A Hotbed of High-Tech", *Financial Times*, June 28, 1992.

88 Marcuse, Herbert. 1966. *Eros and Civilization: A philosophical inquiry into Freud*. Beacon Press,

being taken for a spin by the cultural-industrial complex, albeit in a twisted form, ending up reinvented as the basis for the operationalisation of cognitive-informational capitalism, serving as the ultimate rationalisation of the spectacle to the extent that play becomes indistinguishable from work. Though this claim may sound exaggerated at first – indeed, how on earth could authentic play be considered work? – suffice to say that reality-shows, which are nothing but media-mediated daily routines in which the theatre of the absurd takes on a push-button dimension with the addition of faceless spectators who vote electronically for the direction of the show (*ie.* evicting players out of the game, rewarding players), pay people to play. In the world of reality-TV game shows, players are workers, and vice versa. The day when even a claim as exaggerated as this one may seem now will be obvious is not far. A new reality-TV game show, *Human Resources*⁸⁹, is designed around the concept that players compete against one another for the 'privilege' to work. As expected, the game show has received fierce criticism, especially from left-wing cultural critics and political parties. But that is hardly important. What is more important is that industrial-age definitions of play and work no longer apply to the contemporary game. Now, stripped off of their original meaning, work and play (or the juncture of work and play) are satisfying the requirements of the spectacle for the establishment of a media-hypertrophic situation in which the labourers involved in immaterial production cannot tell with any degree of certainty whether they are working or playing. In fact, for most of them, this question is entirely devoid of any meaning: play has lost the erotic scent it once afforded, and its hedonistic dimension has been incorporated in a trap designed for the mind. Now, the project of work is no longer threatened by sexuality and playfulness: workers are encouraged to indulge in any act of sex and play they wish as long as they do it inside the office, and return back to their work routines with reinvigorated enthusiasm. Contrast the historical development: in Stalinist Russia factory workers were prohibited from putting their hands in their pockets, so that they would not even think of masturbating, whereas, by contrast, in reality game shows workers-players are prohibited from leading an austere life. Game over is now an oxymoron.

THE ILLUSION OF AFFECTIVE LABOUR

Last, I feel that any critique of immaterial labour should also address what has come to be known as affective labour, that is, labour which “produces social networks,

and at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/eros-civilisation/index.htm>
 89 See Lachnit, Carroll. 2002. Playing the HR game - Between The Lines - Human Resources - Television Program Review, November, at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FXS/is_11_81/ai_94638421/print .

forms of community, biopower”^{90 91}. Part of the reason which compels me to engage in such a critique, aside from the fact that affective labour is immaterial labour⁹², is because it has been endowed with the hope that it forms the basis of a revolution⁹³. The hope that affective labour will short-circuit the networks of power, aggravating the situation toward a point of no return, is based largely on a hallucination. Several theorists seem to believe that the more people are involved in the production and manipulation of affects as part of their daily work routines – which is a demand forced upon them by the reinvented logic of informational-cognitive capitalism – the more

90 The concept of biopower originates from Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality (Vol. 1)*. Biopower, according to Foucault, is (the historical format of) power “whose ultimate function is not to kill, but to enclose life from one side to the other” (1982: 171), and which “was undoubtedly a necessary element for the development of capitalism” (*Ibid.* : 172). The rise, as well as the first manifestation, of biopower can be traced back to the 17th century when the system of sexuality started to form the epicentre around which a new *genea* of power would become operational in order to manage the processes of life and the performance of the body. See Foucault, Michel. 1982. *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge. Translated by Γκλόρυ Ροζάκη, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Ρέππα*. It should be noted that Negri's and Hardt's deployment of the concept is far more extensive than Foucault's: while in accordance with Foucault they touch upon the negative aspect of biopower insofar as it is power which is centred on the management of the processes of life and the performance of the body, they extend and enlarge it semiologically and conceptually so that its positive aspects (productive dimension) are also identified, notably that biopower is a format of power which cannot exist without (re)producing social life. In that productive dimension of biopower, Negri and Hardt recognise the potential for subversion and resistance. See Negri and Hardt 2001; and Negri and Hardt 2004.

91 Negri and Hardt 2001, p. 293. See also Hardt, Michael. 1999. Affective Labour. *Boundary 2*, 26, no. 2, Summer, pp. 89-100, and at http://io.khm.de/kr_www/content/io_dencies/io_lavoro_immateriale/texts_by_others/Hardt.pdf and <http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=04/01/07/1258220&mode=nested&tid=4>

92 Negri and Hardt 2001, pp. 29-30. Negri and Hardt maintain that an analysis or critique of immaterial labour is incomplete if it does not lay attention on affective labour. In their words: “One of the most serious shortcomings [of existing analyses focusing on the changing nature of material production and its relation to social reproduction] has thus been the tendency among these authors to treat the new laboring practices in biopolitical society *only* in their intellectual and incorporeal aspects. The productivity of bodies and the value of affect, however, are absolutely central in this context”. In addition, it is very interesting and pertinent to observe here that in Negri's and Hardt's theoretical taxonomy-system of immaterial labour, affective labour is not treated as a metaphysical element for, according to Negri and Hardt, it invariably incorporates aspects of labour done in the bodily mode: “Unlike emotions, which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking” (2004: 108). Elsewhere, Negri explains his choice of terminology: “On this paradoxical rhythm labour becomes affect, or rather, labour finds its value in affect, in so far as the latter is defined as ‘power to act’” (Negri, Antonio. 1999. Value and Affect. *Translated by Arianna Bove, Boundary 2* 26(2), pp. 77-88, first published in *Derive Approdi*, no. 12-13, and at <http://www.generation-online.org/t/valueaffect.htm>). In that way, Negri and Hardt intelligently avoid the trap of letting their analysis slip into the terrain of metaphysics, for the implications arising from such a plane would not be consistent with their overall (materialistic) perspective and discourse. In contrast, in my treatise, affective labour serves to underline the poverty of the metaphysics of immaterial labour for I believe that the sphere of affects can only be speculated on a metaphysical plane; that is why the particular affect I have chosen to elucidate my argument - *eros* (erotic love) - is quintessentially metaphysical.

93 See, for instance, Negri and Hardt 2001; and Negri and Hardt 2004. In fact, this hope permeates the entire late work of Negri and Hardt. Also, in an essay entitled *Affective Labour*, while recognising “that capital has incorporated and exalted affective labor and that affective labor is one of the highest value-producing forms of labor from the point of view of capital”, Michael Hardt, however,

chances people stand of realising that they do not need the mediation of the market or capital in order to be humane, in order to create the social. Thus, through the production of affects (and their circulation, exchange, etc.), we are told we hold the potential to neutralise or annihilate the sphere of power. But as we just said, this delusion is largely based on the belief that affects are exempt from alienation (or could be).

It is worth recalling here that Jean Baudrillard, in *Seduction*, argued that the sphere of seduction, which encompasses all (playful) affects that have the tendency to create social life through our highly fetishistic, magical, teleturgical, and narcissistic ontological residuals, revives a part of human existence that was reckoned to have been lost forever (but it is not). The sphere of seduction is where the political economy of the sign is founded, but most interestingly, it operates on a level of inter-subjective and inter-objective obsession and reversal of perspective that the law of power, regardless of its will, cannot attain. Baudrillard maintains that only seduction can ostracise power away to oblivion, and that is because their antithesis is not dialectical, but symbolic. Seduction operates in the kingdom of signs and images, representing the dominion of the universe of symbols, and is, thus, pure cyclical mediation through appearance, whereas, by contrast, power represents the dominion of the real universe. As such, seduction is not consistent with the principles of performativity and productivity - exactly the opposite: seduction unleashes energies beyond their physical confines, if only to symbolically exchange them before killing them, in much the same way that a sacrificial economy would operate, whereas, power operates in the kingdom permeated by the reality principle and thus seeks to increase performance, production, and desire surpluses in the name of (pseudo)progress. In other words, the immaterial universe of affects, due to its transcendent irrationality, opposes the material sphere of power. There is definitely merit in such a theoretical proposition, and it similarly makes good sense to ascertain that the contemporary phase of the political economy is “about the symbolical dissolution of all social relations, not through the ownership of the means of production, but with the control of the code”⁹⁴. However, as Baudrillard grasped⁹⁵, seduction need not be liberating in

still hopes that: “...the production of affects...present an enormous potential for autonomous circuits of valorization, and perhaps for liberation”.

94 See Baudrillard, Jean. 1990. *The Mirror of Production or the critical illusion of historical materialism*. Translated by Σπύρος Μπενετάτος, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αλεξάνδρεια. p. 112, translated from Greek by the author. In other words, the poverty of everyday life should not be attributed to the level of development of the productive forces that society has attained, but to the universal leverage of the spectacle (and its striking success in orchestrating all of life).

95 It should be noted though that Baudrillard's line of argument, despite its sheer brilliance, is riddled with one main ambiguity: in one passage he claims that seduction transcends the physical limitations of the sphere of power and thus of material culture too (and hence one could be led to conclude that one defies the axiomatics of power by seducing or becoming seduced), and in the next passage, he

absolute terms. On the contrary, the movement of seduction is characterised by a master-slave dialectic: the seducer is the master, and the seduced is the slave. Yet, as with Hegel's original framing of the master-slave dialectic within the realm of labour⁹⁶, this master-slave dialectic, which is inherent in the seduction game, has similarly a characteristic moment of reversal, in which the master becomes the slave and the slave becomes the master⁹⁷. Either way, since seduction is predicated on this dialectic, all one can hope to gain by entering its sphere is to conquer or to be conquered – or actually both. The most persistent manifestation of this dialectic, of course, is in the erotic relationship; besides, we should not forget that seduction is the ultimate erotic game (and eros is the ultimate game of seduction). “But everything changes....What love is not betrayed?”⁹⁸. Despite well-formulated existentialist claims⁹⁹, the ideal of realising ourselves as masters without slaves will not be attained through love (or eros – I use love interchangeably with eros for it is a tautology in the context of this treatise). At this point, whether we choose to side with Karl Marx in predicting that in due time even that which is reckoned to be non-exchangeable and inalienable (that which people share and communicate but do not exchange) – such as virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience – will pass into the sphere of exchange value¹⁰⁰, or we refuse to acknowledge the primacy of the (critique of the) political economy based on the historical development of productive forces, and, thus, we navigate our inquiry toward more mystical and mysterious venues, such as the theory of seduction, we nonetheless ought to understand that even the ultimate transcendent expression of affection – eros – is inseparable from alienation,

proceeds to underline the detrimental effect of seduction on both parties who accept to play the seduction game. Said otherwise, in a nutshell, both the seducer and the seduced are being alienated and distanced from the Other, for the polar opposition between the seducer and the seduced moves in circles with the seducer becoming the seduced and vice versa. In my opinion, I do not think that what Baudrillard's rhetoric aims at is to convince the reader of the emancipatory potential exemplified by the sphere of seduction, but to emancipate the reader from the critical illusion of the ideology of historical materialism, namely that everything in the world can be described and apprehended by reference to the historical development of productive forces, and the corresponding class struggle that ensues between those who own and control the means of production and those who do not. It is in this light that his theory of *seduction* should be read: as a theoretical tool shed which presents a portrait of history that is so radically different from the one most of us take for granted, and as a landmark analysis of the *industry of femininity*. See Baudrillard, Jean. 1984. *Seduction*. Translated by Γιάννης Εμίρης. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Θεωρία.

96 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1967. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Translated by J. B. Baillie (1910), Harper & Row, and at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/phindex.htm>.

97 See Baudrillard, Jean. 1984; and McDonnald, William. 2003. Love in Kierkegaard's Symposia. *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, at <http://www.ul.ie/~philos/vol7/kierkegaard.html>.

98 Deleuze and Guattari, 2001, p.131.

99 See Veneigem, Raoul. 1972. *The Revolution of Everyday Life (Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations)*, translated by Σεραφείμ Βελέντζας, Εκδόσεις Ακμών, especially Ch. XXIII, and at http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/all/pub_contents/5

100 Marx, Karl. 1955. *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Translated by the Institute of Marxism Leninsim. Progress Publishers, at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/index.htm>.

exploitation, and the formation of power relations.

As difficult as it may be to accept the possibility that affects are now nothing but a distorted image of human thought and existence, we have to endure the pain that the contemporary circulation of affects is predicated on the spectacular organisation of the society to the extent that even the supposedly strongest of affects – eros – that which has been praised throughout the centuries for its imagined capacity to transcend class boundaries and otherwise insurmountable obstacles has been reduced to an image. From *Erotocritos* and *Aretousa*, and *Romeo* and *Juliet*, to the melodramatic *Love Story*, the image of love has been perpetuated endlessly as the quintessential human and social transcendence. “The bourgeois idea of love transcends bourgeois society”¹⁰¹. But there is nothing radically transcendent about love when love is pure appearance. “Appearance is that which the thing is in itself, or its truth. But this merely posited Existence which is reflected into otherness is equally the transcending of its itself in its infinitude; to the world of appearance is opposed the world that is reflected into itself, the *world of essence*”¹⁰². The image of love (now?) is the love of the image. “For love everything is imagery, and the image in turn is reality”¹⁰³. Perhaps this has always been true. We should not forget that absolute and pure love is essentially the oldest of all myths, re-iterated through the centuries to both excite and beguile the masses. But myths, we should not forget, are simply that which their name says they are: myths. *Only what appears exists*. Now more than ever before, love unfolds before our very eyes as a tainted myth employed by romantics and punters of all kinds to make us believe that there is still something subversive, inexplicable, exciting and symbolical which has the capacity to shatter the poverty of everyday life. But I am afraid this is the beginning of yet another myth in the making: namely, that we are still capable of true, non-mediated love. But if there is still some idea of love in contemporary circulation, that will have to be sought in the universe of objects which we so much love to identify with, and be seduced by. Perhaps Freud was right from the beginning: it is the object which exerts sexual attraction over the subject. And “whoever sinks so low as to love the stony walls and the windows in rails, does not have and does not see anything else to love”¹⁰⁴. The most striking characteristic that the love mediated by objects and the supposedly transcendent love have in common is that both are psychopathological conditions, which put us to sleep. There are few

101Adorno 2000, #110, translated from Greek by the author.

102Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1969. *Hegel's Science of Logic*. Translated by A. V. Miller, George Allen & Unwin, #1038, and at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hlessenc.htm#HL2_479.

103Kierkegaard, Søren. 2001. *Diary of a Seducer*. Translated by Alastair Hannay, London: Pushkin Press, p. 188.

104Adorno 2000, #61, translated from Greek by the author.

things more reactionary in real life than the consequences of falling in love, of thinking that love is divorced from the demands of material culture, of engaging oneself in a power game that is most aptly described as a predatory capitalism founded on the interplay of affects. Yet, we ought to emphasise that the capacity for love, *whose yearning implies the dismissal from labour*, can be regained. For this to happen, however, we have to re-claim our freedom, to break the spectacular bondage that has transformed us all into petty fetishists and has stolen our consciousness. “Not only the objective capacity, but also the subjective capacity for happiness will be the matter only of freedom”¹⁰⁵. “Love exists only in freedom, only in freedom is there recreation and everlasting amusement”¹⁰⁶. Till this time comes, whether we like it or not, love will be merely a metaphor devoid of meaning, used solely to advance the goals of marketing colonists and political opportunists.

INSTEAD OF EPILOGUE

Sure enough, the factory worker no longer constitutes the revolutionary subject. It is similarly obvious that effective acts of subversion, resistance, and revolt now require an in-depth understanding of how information and ideas propagate via electronic networks; how personal computers and electronic devices can be reverse-engineered, appropriated, and turned into weapons whose destructive capacity far exceeds that of conventional fire-arms. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, a malicious self-reproducing computer virus designed to wreak havoc on whichever electronic network it comes into contact with can be far more effective in bringing down the entire global financial complex than a conventional bomb or a march joined by a few thousands of people. Thus, it follows that the modern revolutionary has to be computer-literate, if not a software programmer. But, of course, that is not to say that the reverse also holds true: not anyone who knows how computers work or is a software programmer is an agent of revolution. Whether hackers-programmers, digital artisans, and knowledge workers make for a good substitute in the long struggle to end (pre)history, only history can tell.

What actually casts doubt on the notion that knowledge workers and hackers will abolish class society is that (to accommodate this new order of things) a new class has arisen that is rapidly amassing increasingly more power through its ability to veto on the vectors of information which it controls, and which both knowledge workers and the industrial capitalists need¹⁰⁷. This is the terrain of history where class struggle is

¹⁰⁵Adorno 2000, #55, translated from Greek by the author.

¹⁰⁶Kierkegaard 2001, p.100.

¹⁰⁷Wark, McKenzie. 2004. *A Hacker Manifesto*. Harvard University Press, and at

being re-written. The capitalist, as John Kenneth Galbraith observed long ago, has been a dwindling figure in the economy. His hegemonic position in the orchestration of the economy has gradually been taken over by committees manned by technocrats that Galbraith termed the technostructure, and that we, today, would be more inclined to refer to as the class of knowledge workers.¹⁰⁸ The emergence of the technostructure, argued Galbraith, was conditioned primarily by the imperatives of sophisticated technology production. This still holds today: semi-autonomous knowledge workers are a requirement of late capitalism, without whom the transition from industrial manufacturing to information feudalism could not have been feasible. Yet, it is misleading to assume that capitalism had, or has, a hard time adapting to this change: the constant presence of friction is not important, since frictionless capitalism, as well as static capitalism, is an oxymoron. On the contrary, the capitalist system not only required the formation of this class, but also incorporated it into its very operational logic. Now, with the rise of this new class, which McKenzie Wark terms the 'vectoralist class', and, which, we should note, has its roots in the hacker universe, yet has chosen to disassociate itself from the interests of the 'digital proletariat', we witness the final stage of the transformation of information into property. This transformation, and the ensuing re-configuration of class struggle that comes with it, are conditioned by the inability of capitalism to maintain its pace and character of historic amplification. For capitalism to elude the spectre of the falling rate of profit and to extend its degree of accumulation, capital has to turn into an image and information, shared lived experiences, and the commons be transformed into commodities. The internal need for continuous amplification, rather than ideology or class struggle, has led the convulsive re-configuration of the convoluted mesh of power relations and the associated relations of production that are manifested as an intellectual property right. The organic composition of capital may well have undergone dramatic change, but the social worker of the present remains subordinated to a regime of spectacular oppression; a regime that substitutes one class for another, yet still maintains its class-based dichotomic character; a regime that by Marx's definition may be seen as non-capitalistic, yet it is still epitomised by the axiomatics of capitalism. To this day, the regime of signs founded on the emancipatory tendency of the "general intellect"¹⁰⁹ negates the old regime of subordination and work done in

http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/warktext.html .

108Galbraith 1974.

109The reference point for the discussion on (the emancipatory potential of) the general intellect is Marx, Karl. 1973. *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. Translated by Martin Nicolaus, Penguin, Notebook VII, and at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch14.htm> . The text that is commonly credited for igniting the discussion in recent years is Negri, Antonio. 1984. *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, ed. Jim Fleming, translated by Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano, South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey. And to mention but a few key works that

factories and businesses, but it does so without negating its own Self. Consequently, although fueled by a desiring machine predicated on social ejaculation, it remains a regime of signs, rather than a concrete situation experienced in the urban territory.

In the long term, a certain degree of technological determinism is rational and reasonable since technology – *in the long term* - knows no limits and submits to no economic or political intentionality. In the short term, however, technology invariably reflects the economic and political agendas of its developers and develops in accordance with them. Said otherwise: although technology, in the long term, has no limits, it can be regulated. In fact, both *licensing* and *architecture*¹¹⁰ control how a given technology will further develop. This characteristic coupled with the path-dependent character of technological change-development affects profoundly the long term evolution of any given technology. On these grounds, to what extent the telos of technology is emancipatory or oppressive remains unknown and wide open to speculation.

Several analysts and theorists seem to believe that there is a self-sustaining or self-amplifying dynamic (or tendency) inscribed in immaterial labour which is bound to obliterate capitalism in much the same way that a large fraction of previous era communists believed that *the* dialectic clearly exemplified that a classless society was the inevitable outcome of the long evolution of capitalism. In fact, often, it is suggested that the dynamic of immaterial labour is the realisation and fulfilment of the

form the epicentre of the discussion, see Negri and Hardt (*The Labour of Dionysus; Empire; Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*); also, see Lazzarato, Maurizio. 1994. General Intellect: Towards an Inquiry into Immaterial Labour, in Red Notes (Eds.) *Immaterial Labour, Mass Intellectuality, New Constitution, Post Fordism and All That...*, Red Notes: London, p. 1-14, and at http://www.emery.archive.mcmail.com/public_html/immaterial/lazzarat.html ; Söderberg, Johan. 2002. Copyleft Vs. Copyright: A Marxist Critique, *First Monday*, volume 7, number 3, March, at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_3/soderberg/ ; Virno, Paolo and Hardt, Michael (Eds.). 1997. *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, University of Minnesota Press.

Regimes of signs aside, the only substantial contribution I could make to the discussion has already been encapsulated in the writings of German playwright Botho Strauss:

The technological revolution finds an *intellect* within its scepticism towards revolution, fatigued in order to be renewed. None enthusiasm of the kind of surrealists and futurists. Unfortunately nothing alike. (*Nobody Other. Translated from german to greek by Λευτέρης Αναγνώστου, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αλεξάνδρεια, 1991, p. 143. Translated from greek to english by the author; italics mine*).

¹¹⁰For a seminal treatise on the effectiveness of *code architecture* as a mechanism to advance political and economic agendas, and to control the deployment, usage, and future development of any given technology, see Lessig 1999.

long postponed prophecy of that previous era. Whereas there is no doubt that capitalism cannot be sustainable in the long-term since its axiomatics are antithetical to sustainability, it does not, however, follow from this that what capitalism will be replaced by is a Marxist Utopia. Actually, there is no chance of a classless society being realised non-violently, as if by magic, due to the historical progression of this dynamic. Certainly, the dynamic exists, but for the dynamic to fulfil its prophecy people have to be self-conscious of the changes they want to see realised. Unless collective subjectivity becomes radical, and people become self-aware of where their real interests lie, there is nothing to guarantee that the dynamic alone will suffice to propel society toward emancipation. “The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality”¹¹¹.

For the left, immaterial labour feeds the delusion that there is (still) hope for a universal social revolution, for the re-making of society along democratic ideals. For the right, immaterial labour feeds the delusion that armed with the right set of skills one will never experience alienation and exploitation at work. Both hopes are equally onerous. Fact of the matter is that there is neither Left nor Right under the hegemony of immaterial labour: there is only a globalised terrain which rationalises the imaginary of work done in the service of signs, and operationalises the spectacular demand for cognitive slaves.

¹¹¹Debord 1983, #19.

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