

Three Essays by Bob Black

The Abolition of Work

Primitive Affluence: A Postscript to Sahlins

Technophilia, An Infantile Disorder



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intellectually, impulsively, impassively, or any damn way? Or do you find as day follows day that day follows day, and that's about it? That the only "important matters" that affect you, if there even are any, are decided, if they even are, by somebody else? Have you noticed your lack of power to chart your own destiny? That your access to "virtual" reality increases in proportion as you distance yourself (a prudent move) from the real thing? That aside from working and paying, you are of absolutely no use to this society and can't expect to be kept around after you can't do either? And finally, does Walter Alter's technophilic techno-capitalist caterwauling in any way help you to interpret the future, much less -- and much more important -- to change it?

methods of discovery.” There are no true methods of discovery, only useful ones. In principle, reading the Bible or dropping acid is as legitimate a practice in the context of discovery as is keeping up with the technical journals. Whether Archimedes actually gleaned inspiration from hopping in the tub or Newton from watching an apple fall is not important. What’s important is that these -- any -- triggers to creativity are possible and, if effective, desirable.

Intuition is important, not as an occult authoritative faculty, but as a source of hypotheses in all fields. And also of insights not yet, if ever, formalizable, but nonetheless meaningful and heuristic in the hermeneutic disciplines which rightfully refuse to concede that if they are not susceptible to quantification they are mystical. Many disciplines since admitted to the pantheon of science (such as biology, geology and economics) would have been aborted by this anachronistic dogma. “Consider the source” is what Alter calls “bad scientific method.” We hear much (too much) of the conflict between evolutionism and creationism. It takes only a nodding acquaintance with Western intellectual history to recognize that the theory of evolution is a secularization of the eschatology which distinguishes Christianity from other religious traditions. But having Christianity as its context of discovery is a very unscientific reason to reject evolution. Or, for that matter, to accept it.

Alter is not what he pretends to be, a paladin of reason assailing the irrationalist hordes. The only thing those on his enemies list have in common is that they’re on it. Ayn Rand, whose hysterical espousal of “reason” was Alterism without the pop science jargon, had a list of irrationalists including homosexuals, liberals, Christians, anti-Zionists, Marxists, abstract expressionists, hippies, technophobes, racists, and smokers of pot (but not tobacco). Alter’s list (surely incomplete) includes sado-masochists, New Agers, anthropologists, schizophrenics, anti-authoritarians, Christian Fundamentalists, think tank social engineers, Fascists, proto-Cubists . . . Round up the unusual suspects. Alter’s just playing a naming-and-blaming game because he doesn’t get enough tool extensions.

“How many times a day do you really strike forward on important matters intuitively?” Well said -- and as good a point as any to give this guy the hook. Riddle me this, Mr. or Ms. Reader: How many times a day do you really strike forward on important matters AT ALL? How many times a day do you “strike forward on important matters” -- intuitively, ironically,



THE ABOLITION OF WORK

No one should ever work.

Work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world. Almost any evil you'd care to name comes from working or from living in a world designed for work. In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working.

That doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a ludic conviviality, commensality, and maybe even art. There is more to play than child's play, as worthy as that is. I call for a collective adventure in generalized joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive. Doubtless we all need a lot more time for sheer sloth and slack than we ever enjoy now, regardless of income or occupation, but once recovered from employment-induced exhaustion nearly all of us want to act. Oblomovism and Stakhanovism are two sides of the same debased coin.

The ludic life is totally incompatible with existing reality. So much the worse for "reality," the gravity hole that sucks the vitality from the little in life that still distinguishes it from mere survival. Curiously -- or maybe not -- all the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchism, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else.

Liberals say we should end employment discrimination. I say we should end employment. Conservatives support right-to-work laws. Following Karl Marx's wayward son-in-law Paul Lafargue I support the right to be lazy. Leftists favor full employment. Like the surrealists -- except that I'm not kidding -- I favor full unemployment. Trotskyists agitate for permanent revolution. I agitate for permanent revelry. But if all the ideologues

generalizable. But because they demonstrate that life once was, that life can be, radically different. The point is not to recreate that way of life (although there may be some occasions to do that) but to appreciate that, if a life-way so utterly contradictory to ours is feasible, which indeed has a million-year track record, then maybe other life-ways contradictory to ours are feasible.

For a 21st century schizoid man of wealth and taste, Alter has an awfully retarded vocabulary. He assumes that babytalk babblewords like "good" and "evil" mean something more than "me like" and "me no like," but if they do mean anything more to him he hasn't distributed the surplus to the rest of us. He accuses his chosen enemies of "infantilism and anti-parental vengeance," echoing the authoritarianism of Lenin ("Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder) and Freud, respectively. A typical futurist -- and the original Futurists did embrace Fascism -- he's about a century behind Heisenberg and Nietzsche and the rest of us. Moralism is retrograde. You want something? Don't tell me you're "right" and I'm "wrong," I don't care what God or Santa Claus likes, never mind if I've been naughty or nice. Just tell me what you want that I have and why I should give it to you. I can't guarantee we'll come to terms, but articulation succeeded by negotiation is the only possible way to settle a dispute without coercion. As Proudhon put it, "I want no laws, but I am ready to bargain."

Alter clings to objective "physical reality" -- matter in motion -- with the same faith a child clutches his mother's hand. And faith, for Alter and children of all ages, is always shadowed by fear. Alter is (to quote Clifford Geertz) "afraid reality is going to go away unless we believe very hard in it." He'll never experience an Oedipal crisis because he'll never grow up that much. A wind-up world is the only kind he can understand. He thinks the solar system actually is an orrery. He has no tolerance for ambiguity, relativity, indeterminacy -- no tolerance, in fact, for tolerance.

Alter seems to have learned nothing of science except some badly bumbled-up jargon. In denouncing "bad scientific method" and "intuition" in almost the same bad breath, he advertises his ignorance of the pluralism of scientific method. Even so resolute a positivist as Karl Popper distinguished the "context of justification," which he thought entailed compliance with a rather rigid demonstrative orthodoxy, from the "context of discovery" where, as Paul Feyerabend gleefully observed, "anything goes." Alter reveals how utterly out of it he is by a casual reference to "true

and yet he founded the science of genetics. Alter, far from founding any science, gives no indication of even beginning to understand any of them.

The merits and demerits of Margaret Mead's ethnography are less than peripheral to Alter's polemic. It wasn't Mead who discovered and reported that hunter-gatherers work a lot less than we do. There is something very off about a control freak who insists that ideas he cannot accept or understand are Fascist. I cannot denounce this kind of jerkoff opportunism too strongly. "Fascist" is not, as Alter supposes, an all-purpose epithet synonymous with "me no like." I once wrote an essay, "Feminism as Fascism," which occasioned a great deal of indignation, although it has held up only too well. But I didn't mind that because I'd been careful and specific about identifying the precise parallels between Fascism and so-called (radical) feminism -- about half a dozen. That's half a dozen more analogies between feminism and Fascism than Alter identifies between Fascism and anarcho-leftism or primito-nostalgia. The only anarcho-leftists with any demonstrable affinities to Fascism (to which, in Italy, they provided many recruits) are the Syndicalists, a dwindling sect, the last anarchists to share Alter's retrograde scientism. It's Alter, not his enemies, who calls for "a guiding, cohesive body of knowledge and experience as a frame of reference" -- just one frame of reference, mind you -- for "diagrams and manuals," for marching orders. There happen to be real-life Fascists in this imperfect world of ours. By trivializing the word, Alter (who is far from alone in this), purporting to oppose Fascists, in fact equips them with a cloaking device.

Artists, wails Walter, "don't believe that technology is a good thing, intrinsically." I don't much care what artists believe, especially if Alter is typical of them, but their reported opinion does them credit. I'd have thought it obnoxious, ignoring the obvious, to believe in technology "intrinsically," not as the means to an end or ends it's marketed as, but as some sort of be-all and end-all of no use to anybody. Art-for-art's-sake is a debatable credo but at least it furnishes art which for some pleases by its beauty. Technology for its own sake makes no sense at all, no more than Dr. Frankenstein's monster. If tech-for-tech's sake isn't the antithesis of reason, I don't know reason from squat and I'd rather not.

The communist-anarchist hunter-gatherers (for that is what, to be precise, they are), past and present, are important. Not (necessarily) for their successful habitat-specific adaptations since these are, by definition, not

(as they do) advocate work -- and not only because they plan to make other people do theirs -- they are strangely reluctant to say so. They will carry on endlessly about wages, hours, working conditions, exploitation, productivity, profitability. They'll gladly talk about anything but work itself. These experts who offer to do our thinking for us rarely share their conclusions about work, for all its saliency in the lives of all of us. Among themselves they quibble over the details. Unions and management agree that we ought to sell the time of our lives in exchange for survival, although they haggle over the price. Marxists think we should be bossed by bureaucrats. Libertarians think we should be bossed by businessmen. Feminists don't care which form bossing takes so long as the bosses are women. Clearly these ideology-mongers have serious differences over how to divvy up the spoils of power. Just as clearly, none of them have any objection to power as such and all of them want to keep us working.

You may be wondering if I'm joking or serious. I'm joking and serious. To be ludic is not to be ludicrous. Play doesn't have to be frivolous, although frivolity isn't triviality: very often we ought to take frivolity seriously. I'd like life to be a game -- but a game with high stakes. I want to play for keeps.

The alternative to work isn't just idleness. To be ludic is not to be quaaludic. As much as I treasure the pleasure of torpor, it's never more rewarding than when it punctuates other pleasures and pastimes. Nor am I promoting the managed time-disciplined safety-valve called "leisure"; far from it. Leisure is nonwork for the sake of work. Leisure is the time spent recovering from work and in the frenzied but hopeless attempt to forget about work. Many people return from vacation so beat that they look forward to returning to work so they can rest up. The main difference between work and leisure is that work at least you get paid for your alienation and enervation.

I am not playing definitional games with anybody. When I say I want to abolish work, I mean just what I say, but I want to say what I mean by defining my terms in non-idiosyncratic ways. My minimum definition of work is forced labor, that is, compulsory production. Both elements are essential. Work is production enforced by economic or political means, by the carrot or the stick. (The carrot is just the stick by other means.) But not all creation is work. Work is never done for its own sake, it's done on

account of some product or output that the worker (or, more often, somebody else) gets out of it. This is what work necessarily is. To define it is to despise it. But work is usually even worse than its definition decrees. The dynamic of domination intrinsic to work tends over time toward elaboration. In advanced work-riddled societies, including all industrial societies whether capitalist or "Communist," work invariably acquires other attributes which accentuate its obnoxiousness.

Usually -- and this is even more true in "Communist" than capitalist countries, where the state is almost the only employer and everyone is an employee -- work is employment, i. e., wage-labor, which means selling yourself on the installment plan. Thus 95% of Americans who work, work for somebody (or something) else. In the USSR or Cuba or Yugoslavia or any other alternative model which might be adduced, the corresponding figure approaches 100%. Only the embattled Third World peasant bastions -- Mexico, India, Brazil, Turkey -- temporarily shelter significant concentrations of agriculturists who perpetuate the traditional arrangement of most laborers in the last several millenia, the payment of taxes (= ransom) to the state or rent to parasitic landlords in return for being otherwise left alone. Even this raw deal is beginning to look good. All industrial (and office) workers are employees and under the sort of surveillance which ensures servility.

But modern work has worse implications. People don't just work, they have "jobs." One person does one productive task all the time on an or-else basis. Even if the task has a quantum of intrinsic interest (as increasingly many jobs don't) the monotony of its obligatory exclusivity drains its ludic potential. A "job" that might engage the energies of some people, for a reasonably limited time, for the fun of it, is just a burden on those who have to do it for forty hours a week with no say in how it should be done, for the profit of owners who contribute nothing to the project, and with no opportunity for sharing tasks or spreading the work among those who actually have to do it. This is the real world of work: a world of bureaucratic blundering, of sexual harassment and discrimination, of bonehead bosses exploiting and scapegoating their subordinates who -- by any rational-technical criteria -- should be calling the shots. But capitalism in the real world subordinates the rational maximization of productivity and profit to the exigencies of organizational control.

About the only specific reference Alter makes is to Margaret Mead, "a semi-literate sectarian specializing in 'doping the samples' when they didn't fit into her pre-existent doctrine" (never specified). Mead was poorly trained prior to her first fieldwork in Samoa, but to call the author of a number of well-written best-sellers "semi-literate" falls well short of even semi-literate, it's just plain stupid. I'd say Alter was a semi-literate sectarian doping the facts except that he's really a semi-literate sectarian ignoring the facts.

Mead's major conclusions were that the Samoans were sexually liberal and that they were, relative to interwar Americans, more cooperative than competitive. Mead -- the bisexual protege of the lesbian Ruth Benedict -- may well have projected her own sexual liberalism onto the natives. But modern ethnographies (such as Robert Suggs' *Mangaia*) as well as historical sources from Captain Cook forwards confirm that most Pacific island societies really were closer to the easygoing hedonistic idyll Mead thought she saw in Samoa than to some Hobbesian horrorshow. Alter rails against romanticism, subjectivity, mysticism -- the usual suspects -- but won't look the real, regularly replicated facts about primitive society in the face. He's in denial.

If Mead's findings as to sexuality and maturation have been revised by subsequent fieldwork, her characterization of competition and cooperation in the societies she studied has not. By any standard, our modern (state-) capitalist society is what statisticians call an outlier -- a sport, a freak, a monster -- at an extraordinary distance from most observations, the sort that pushes variance and variation far apart. There is no "double standard employing an extreme criticism against all bourgeoisie [sic], capitalist, spectacular, commodity factors" -- the departure is only as extreme as the departure from community as it's been experienced by most hominid societies for the last several million years. It's as if Alter denounced a yardstick as prejudiced because it establishes that objects of three feet or more are longer than all those that are not. If this is science, give me mysticism or give me death.

Alter insinuates, without demonstrating, that Mead faked evidence. Even if she did, we know that many illustrious scientists, among them Galileo and Gregor Mendel, faked or fudged reports of their experiments to substantiate conclusions now universally accepted. Mendel, to make matters worse, was a Catholic monk, a "mystic" according to Alter's demonology,

and it isn't the opposite either. As Richard Borshay Lee ascertained, the Kung San ("Bushmen") of Botswana have a population structure closer to that of the United States than to that of the typical Third World country with its peasant majority. Foragers' lives are not all that short. Only recently have the average lifespans in the privileged metropolis nations surpassed prehistoric rates.

As for whether the lives of primitives are "brutal," as compared to those of, say, Detroiters, that is obviously a moralistic, not a scientific, judgment. If brutality refers to the quality of life, foragers, as Marshall Sahlins demonstrated in "The Original Affluent Society," work much less and socialize and party much more than we moderns do. None of them take orders from an asshole boss or get up before noon or work a five-day week or -- well, you get the idea.

Alter smugly observes that "damn few aboriginal societies are being created and lived in fully by those doing the praising [of them]." No shit. So what? These societies never were created; they evolved. The same industrial and capitalist forces which are extinguishing existing aboriginal societies place powerful obstacles to forming new ones. What we deplore is precisely what we have lost, including the skills to recreate it. Alter is just cheerleading for the pigs. Like I said, they'd pay him (but probably not very well) if he weren't doing it for free.

Admittedly an occasional anthropologist and an occasional "anarcho-leftist" has in some respects romanticized primitive life at one time or another, but on nothing like the scale on which Alter falsifies the ethnographic record. Richard Borshay Lee and Marshall Sahlins today represent the conventional wisdom as regards hunter-gatherer societies. They don't romanticize anything. They don't have to. A romanticist would claim that the primitive society he or she studies is virtually free of conflict and violence, as did Elizabeth Marshall Thomas in her book on the San/Bushmen, *The Harmless People*. Lee's later, more painstaking observations established per capita homicide rates for the San not much lower than from those of the contemporary United States. Sahlins made clear that the tradeoff for the leisurely, well-fed hunting-gathering life was not accumulating any property which could not be conveniently carried away. Whether this is any great sacrifice is a value judgment, not a scientific finding -- a distinction to which Alter is as oblivious as any medieval monk.

The degradation which most workers experience on the job is the sum of assorted indignities which can be denominated as "discipline." Foucault has complexified this phenomenon but it is simple enough. Discipline consists of the totality of totalitarian controls at the workplace -- surveillance, rote work, imposed work tempos, production quotas, punching -in and -out, etc. Discipline is what the factory and the office and the store share with the prison and the school and the mental hospital. It is something historically original and horrible. It was beyond the capacities of such demonic dictators of yore as Nero and Genghis Khan and Ivan the Terrible. For all their bad intentions they just didn't have the machinery to control their subjects as thoroughly as modern despots do. Discipline is the distinctively diabolical modern mode of control, it is an innovative intrusion which must be interdicted at the earliest opportunity.

Such is "work." Play is just the opposite. Play is always voluntary. What might otherwise be play is work if it's forced. This is axiomatic. Bernie de Koven has defined play as the "suspension of consequences." This is unacceptable if it implies that play is inconsequential. The point is not that play is without consequences. This is to demean play. The point is that the consequences, if any, are gratuitous. Playing and giving are closely related, they are the behavioral and transactional facets of the same impulse, the play-instinct. They share an aristocratic disdain for results. The player gets something out of playing; that's why he plays. But the core reward is the experience of the activity itself (whatever it is). Some otherwise attentive students of play, like Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*), define it as game-playing or following rules. I respect Huizinga's erudition but emphatically reject his constraints. There are many good games (chess, baseball, Monopoly, bridge) which are rule-governed but there is much more to play than game-playing. Conversation, sex, dancing, travel -- these practices aren't rule-governed but they are surely play if anything is. And rules can be played with at least as readily as anything else.

Work makes a mockery of freedom. The official line is that we all have rights and live in a democracy. Other unfortunates who aren't free like we are have to live in police states. These victims obey orders or-else, no matter how arbitrary. The authorities keep them under regular surveillance. State bureaucrats control even the smaller details of everyday life. The officials who push them around are answerable only to higher-ups, public or private. Either way, dissent and disobedience are punished. Informers

report regularly to the authorities. All this is supposed to be a very bad thing.

And so it is, although it is nothing but a description of the modern workplace. The liberals and conservatives and libertarians who lament totalitarianism are phonies and hypocrites. There is more freedom in any moderately deStalinized dictatorship than there is in the ordinary American workplace. You find the same sort of hierarchy and discipline in an office or factory as you do in a prison or monastery. In fact, as Foucault and others have shown, prisons and factories came in at about the same time, and their operators consciously borrowed from each other's control techniques. A worker is a part time slave. The boss says when to show up, when to leave, and what to do in the meantime. He tells you how much work to do and how fast. He is free to carry his control to humiliating extremes, regulating, if he feels like it, the clothes you wear or how often you go to the bathroom. With a few exceptions he can fire you for any reason, or no reason. He has you spied on by snitches and supervisors, he amasses a dossier on every employee. Talking back is called "insubordination," just as if a worker is a naughty child, and it not only gets you fired, it disqualifies you for unemployment compensation. Without necessarily endorsing it for them either, it is noteworthy that children at home and in school receive much the same treatment, justified in their case by their supposed immaturity. What does this say about their parents and teachers who work?

The demeaning system of domination I've described rules over half the waking hours of a majority of women and the vast majority of men for decades, for most of their lifespans. For certain purposes it's not too misleading to call our system democracy or capitalism or -- better still -- industrialism, but its real names are factory fascism and office oligarchy. Anybody who says these people are "free" is lying or stupid. You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid monotonous work, chances are you'll end up boring, stupid and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinization all around us than even such significant moronizing mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed off to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home at the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families they start,

evitably suicidal. Anthropologists know better. For Alter it's an article of faith that agriculture is technologically superior to foraging. But the ancestors of the Plains Indians were sedentary or semisedentary agriculturists who abandoned that life-way because the arrival of the horse made possible (not necessary) the choice of a simpler hunting existence which they must have adjudged qualitatively superior. The Kpelle of Liberia refuse to switch from dry- to wet-cultivation of rice, their staple food, as economic development "experts" urge them to. The Kpelle are well aware that wet (irrigated) rice farming is much more productive than dry farming. But dry farming is conducted communally, with singing and feasting and drinking, in a way which wet farming cannot be -- and it's much easier work at a healthier, more comfortable "work station." If their culture should "die" as a result of this eminently reasonable choice it will be murder, not suicide. If by progress Alter means exterminating people because we can and because they're different, he can take his progress and shove it. He defames science by defending it.

Even the history of Western civilization (the only one our ethnocentric futurist takes seriously) contradicts Alter's theory of technological will-to-power. For well over a thousand years, classical civilization flourished without any significant "application of tool extension." Even when Hellenistic or Roman science advanced, its technology usually did not. It created the steam engine, then forgot about the toy, as China (another counter-example to Alterism) invented gunpowder and used it to scare away demons -- arguably its best use. Of course, ancient societies came to an end, but they all do: as Keynes put it, in the long run, we will all be dead.

And I have my suspicions about the phrase "tool extension." Isn't something to do with that advertised in the back of porn magazines?

Alter must be lying, not merely mistaken, when he reiterates the Hobbesian myth that "primitive life is short and brutal." He cannot possibly even be aware of the existence of those he tags as anthro-romanticists without knowing that they have demonstrated otherwise to the satisfaction of their fellow scientists. The word "primitive" is for many purposes -- including this one -- too vague and overinclusive to be useful. It might refer to anything from the few surviving hunter-gathering societies to the ethnic minority peasantry of modernizing Third World states (like the Indians of Mexico or Peru). Life expectancy is a case in point. Alter wants his readers to suppose that longevity is a function of techno-social complexity. It isn't,

viously the sun circles the earth. Obviously the earth is flat. Obviously the table before me is solid, not, as atomic-science mystics claim, almost entirely empty space. Obviously particles cannot also be waves. Obviously human society is impossible without a state. Obviously hunter-gatherers work harder than contemporary wage-laborers. Obviously the death penalty deters crime. But nothing is more obvious, if anything is, than that all these propositions are false. Which is to say, they cannot qualify as "facts" within any framework which even their own proponents acknowledge as their own. Indeed, all the advocates (of such of these opinions as still have any) stridently affirm, like Alter, a positivist-empiricist framework in which their falsity is conspicuous.

So then -- to get down to details -- forward into the past. Alter rants against what he calls the "romanticist attachment to a 'simpler,' 'purer' existence in past times or among contemporary primitive or 'Eastern' societies." Hold it right there. Nobody that I know of is conflating past or present primitive societies with "Eastern" societies (presumably the civilizations of China and India and their offshoots in Japan, Korea, Burma, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, etc.). These "Eastern" societies much more closely resemble the society -- ours -- which "anarcho-leftists" want to overthrow than they do any primitive society. Both feature the state, the market, class stratification and sacerdotally controlled religion, which are absent from all band (forager) societies and many tribal societies. If primitive and Eastern societies have common features of any importance to his argument (had he troubled to formulate one) Alter does not identify them.

For Alter it is a "crushing reality that the innate direction that any sentient culture will take to amplify its well-being will be to increase the application of tool-extensions." Cultures are not "sentient"; that is to reify and mystify their nature. Nor do cultures necessarily have any "innate direction." As an ex- (or crypto-) Marxist -- he is a former (?) follower of Lyndon LaRouche in his Stalinist, "National Caucus of Labor Committees" phase -- Alter has no excuse for not knowing this. Although Marx was most interested in a mode of production -- capitalism -- which, he argued, did have an innate direction, he also identified an "Asiatic mode of production" which did not; Karl Wittfogel elaborated on the insight in his *Oriental Despotism*. Our seer prognosticates that "if that increase stops, the culture will die." This we know to be false.

If Alter is correct, for a society to regress to a simpler technology is in-

thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it.

We are so close to the world of work that we can't see what it does to us. We have to rely on outside observers from other times or other cultures to appreciate the extremity and the pathology of our present position. There was a time in our own past when the "work ethic" would have been incomprehensible, and perhaps Weber was on to something when he tied its appearance to a religion, Calvinism, which if it emerged today instead of four centuries ago would immediately and appropriately be labeled a cult. Be that as it may, we have only to draw upon the wisdom of antiquity to put work in perspective. The ancients saw work for what it is, and their view prevailed, the Calvinist cranks notwithstanding, until overthrown by industrialism -- but not before receiving the endorsement of its prophets.

Let's pretend for a moment that work doesn't turn people into stultified submissives. Let's pretend, in defiance of any plausible psychology and the ideology of its boosters, that it has no effect on the formation of character. And let's pretend that work isn't as boring and tiring and humiliating as we all know it really is. Even then, work would still make a mockery of all humanistic and democratic aspirations, just because it usurps so much of our time. Socrates said that manual laborers make bad friends and bad citizens because they have no time to fulfill the responsibilities of friendship and citizenship. He was right. Because of work, no matter what we do we keep looking at our watches. The only thing "free" about so-called free time is that it doesn't cost the boss anything. Free time is mostly devoted to getting ready for work, going to work, returning from work, and recovering from work. Free time is a euphemism for the peculiar way labor as a factor of production not only transports itself at its own expense to and from the workplace but assumes primary responsibility for its own maintenance and repair. Coal and steel don't do that. Lathes and typewriters don't do that. But workers do. No wonder Edward G. Robinson in one of his gangster movies exclaimed, "Work is for saps!"

Both Plato and Xenophon attribute to Socrates and obviously share with him an awareness of the destructive effects of work on the worker as a citizen and a human being. Herodotus identified contempt for work as

an attribute of the classical Greeks at the zenith of their culture. To take only one Roman example, Cicero said that "whoever gives his labor for money sells himself and puts himself in the rank of slaves." His candor is now rare, but contemporary primitive societies which we are wont to look down upon have provided spokesmen who have enlightened Western anthropologists. The Kapauku of West Irian, according to Posposil, have a conception of balance in life and accordingly work only every other day, the day of rest designed "to regain the lost power and health." Our ancestors, even as late as the eighteenth century when they were far along the path to our present predicament, at least were aware of what we have forgotten, the underside of industrialization. Their religious devotion to "St. Monday" -- thus establishing a de facto five-day week 150-200 years before its legal consecration -- was the despair of the earliest factory owners. They took a long time in submitting to the tyranny of the bell, predecessor of the time clock. In fact it was necessary for a generation or two to replace adult males with women accustomed to obedience and children who could be molded to fit industrial needs. Even the exploited peasants of the ancient regime wrested substantial time back from their landlord's work. According to Lafargue, a fourth of the French peasants' calendar was devoted to Sundays and holidays, and Chayanov's figures from villages in Czarist Russia -- hardly a progressive society -- likewise show a fourth or fifth of peasants' days devoted to repose. Controlling for productivity, we are obviously far behind these backward societies. The exploited muzhiks would wonder why any of us are working at all. So should we.

To grasp the full enormity of our deterioration, however, consider the earliest condition of humanity, without government or property, when we wandered as hunter-gatherers. Hobbes surmised that life was then nasty, brutish and short. Others assume that life was a desperate unrelenting struggle for subsistence, a war waged against a harsh Nature with death and disaster awaiting the unlucky or anyone who was unequal to the challenge of the struggle for existence. Actually, that was all a projection of fears for the collapse of government authority over communities unaccustomed to doing without it, like the England of Hobbes during the Civil War. Hobbes' compatriots had already encountered alternative forms of society which illustrated other ways of life -- in North America, particularly -- but already these were too remote from their experience to be understandable. (The lower orders, closer to the condition of the Indians, understood it better and often found it attractive. Throughout the seventeenth century, English

in which they flourish at the expense of most of the rest of us?

If by religion is meant reverence for something not understood, Alter is fervently religious. He mistakes science for codified knowledge (that was natural history, long since as defunct as phrenology). Science is a social practice with distinctive methods, not an accumulation of officially certified "facts." There are no naked, extracontextual facts. Facts are always relative to a context. Scientific facts are relative to a theory or a paradigm (i.e., to a formalized context). Are electrons particles or waves? Neither and both, according to Niels Bohr -- it depends on where you are looking from and why. Are the postulates and theorems of Euclidean geometry "true"? They correspond very well to much of the physical universe, but Einstein found that Riemann's non-Euclidean geometry better described such crucial phenomena as gravitation and the deflection of light rays. Each geometry is internally consistent; each is inconsistent with the other. No conceivable fact or facts would resolve their discrepancy. As much as they would like to transcend the inconsistency, physicists have learned to live with the incommensurable theories of relativity and quantum physics because they both work (almost). Newtonian physics is still very serviceable inside the solar system, where there are still a few "facts" (like the precession of Mercury) not amenable to Einsteinian relativity, but the latter is definitely the theory of choice for application to the rest of the universe. To call the one true and the other false is like calling a Toyota true and a Model-T false.

Theories create facts -- and theories destroy them. Science is simultaneously, and necessarily, progressive and regressive. Unlike Walter Alter, science privileges neither direction. There is no passive, preexisting, "organised, patterned, predicted and graspable" universe out there awaiting our Promethean touch. Insofar as the Universe is orderly -- which, for all we know, may not be all that far -- we make it so. Not only in the obvious sense that we form families and build cities, ordering our own life-ways, but merely by the patterning power of perception, by which we resolve a welter of sense-data into a "table" where there are "really" only a multitude of tiny particles and mostly empty space.

Alter rages against obnosis, his ill-formed neologism for ignoring the obvious. But ignoring the obvious is "obviously" the precondition for science. As S.F.C. Milsom put it, "things that are obvious cannot be slightly wrong: like the movement of the sun, they can only be fundamentally wrong." Ob-

only a few decades after James Joyce did. And well under 3000 years since the Romans did both. The pace of progress can be dizzying.

For Alter, the future is a program that Karl Marx and Jules Verne mapped out in a previous century. Evolution is unilinear, technologically driven and, for some strange reason, morally imperative. These notions were already old when Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx cobbled them together. Alter's positivism is no improvement on that of Comte, who gave the game away by founding a Positivist Church. And his mechanical materialism is actually a regression from Marxism to Stalinism. Like bad science fiction, but not as entertaining, Alterism is 19th century ideology declaimed in 21st century jargon. (One of the few facts about the future at once certain and reassuring is that it will not talk like Walter Alter any more than the present talks like Hugo Gernsback.) Alter hasn't written one word with which Newt Gingrich or Walt Disney, defrosted, would disagree. The "think tank social engineers" are on his side; or rather, he's on theirs. They don't think the way he does -- that barely qualifies as thinking at all -- but they want us to think the way he does. The only reason he isn't on their payroll is why pay him if he's willing to do it for nothing?

"Info overload is relative to your skill level," intones Alter. It's certainly relative to his. He bounces from technology to anthropology to history and back again like the atoms of the Newtonian billiard-ball universe that scientists, unlike Alter, no longer believe in. The breadth of his ignorance amazes, a wondering world can only, with Groucho Marx, ask: "Is there anything else you know absolutely nothing about?" If syndicalism is (as one wag put it) fascism minus the excitement, Alterism is empiricism minus the evidence. He sports the toga of reason without stating any reason for doing so. He expects us to take his rejection of faith on faith. He fiercely affirms that facts are facts without mentioning any.

Alter is much too upset to be articulate, but at least he's provided an enemies list -- although, like Senator McCarthy, he would rather issue vague categorical denunciations than name names. High on the list are "primitivo-nostalgic" "anthro-romanticists" who are either also, or are giving aid and comfort to, "anti-authoritarians" of the "anarcho-left." To the lay reader all these mysterious hyphenations are calculated to inspire a vague dread without communicating any information whom they refer to except dupes of the think tank social engineers and enemies of civilization. But why should the think tank social engineers want to destroy the civilization

settlers defected to Indian tribes or, captured in war, refused to return. But the Indians no more defected to white settlements than Germans climb the Berlin Wall from the west.) The "survival of the fittest" version -- the Thomas Huxley version -- of Darwinism was a better account of economic conditions in Victorian England than it was of natural selection, as the anarchist Kropotkin showed in his book *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution*. (Kropotkin was a scientist -- a geographer -- who'd had ample involuntary opportunity for fieldwork whilst exiled in Siberia: he knew what he was talking about.) Like most social and political theory, the story Hobbes and his successors told was really unacknowledged autobiography.

The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, surveying the data on contemporary hunter-gatherers, exploded the Hobbesian myth in an article entitled "The Original Affluent Society." They work a lot less than we do, and their work is hard to distinguish from what we regard as play. Sahlins concluded that "hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society." They worked an average of four hours a day, assuming they were "working" at all. Their "labor," as it appears to us, was skilled labor which exercised their physical and intellectual capacities; unskilled labor on any large scale, as Sahlins says, is impossible except under industrialism. Thus it satisfied Friedrich Schiller's definition of play, the only occasion on which man realizes his complete humanity by giving full "play" to both sides of his twofold nature, thinking and feeling. As he put it: "The animal works when deprivation is the mainspring of its activity, and it plays when the fullness of its strength is this mainspring, when superabundant life is its own stimulus to activity." (A modern version -- dubiously developmental -- is Abraham Maslow's counterposition of "deficiency" and "growth" motivation.) Play and freedom are, as regards production, coextensive. Even Marx, who belongs (for all his good intentions) in the productivist pantheon, observed that "the realm of freedom does not commence until the point is passed where labor under the compulsion of necessity and external utility is required." He never could quite bring himself to identify this happy circumstance as what it is, the abolition of work -- it's rather anomalous, after all, to be pro-worker and anti-work -- but we can.

The aspiration to go backwards or forwards to a life without work is evi-

dent in every serious social or cultural history of pre-industrial Europe, among them M. Dorothy George's *England In Transition* and Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Also pertinent is Daniel Bell's essay, "Work and its Discontents," the first text, I believe, to refer to the "revolt against work" in so many words and, had it been understood, an important correction to the complacency ordinarily associated with the volume in which it was collected, *The End of Ideology*. Neither critics nor celebrants have noticed that Bell's end-of-ideology thesis signaled not the end of social unrest but the beginning of a new, uncharted phase unconstrained and uninformed by ideology. It was Seymour Lipset (in *Political Man*), not Bell, who announced at the same time that "the fundamental problems of the Industrial Revolution have been solved," only a few years before the post- or meta-industrial discontents of college students drove Lipset from UC Berkeley to the relative (and temporary) tranquility of Harvard.

As Bell notes, Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, for all his enthusiasm for the market and the division of labor, was more alert to (and more honest about) the seamy side of work than Ayn Rand or the Chicago economists or any of Smith's modern epigones. As Smith observed: "The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations... has no occasion to exert his understanding... He generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become." Here, in a few blunt words, is my critique of work. Bell, writing in 1956, the Golden Age of Eisenhower imbecility and American self-satisfaction, identified the unorganized, unorganizable malaise of the 1970's and since, the one no political tendency is able to harness, the one identified in HEW's report *Work in America*, the one which cannot be exploited and so is ignored. That problem is the revolt against work. It does not figure in any text by any laissez-faire economist -- Milton Friedman, Murray Rothbard, Richard Posner -- because, in their terms, as they used to say on *Star Trek*, "it does not compute."

If these objections, informed by the love of liberty, fail to persuade humanists of a utilitarian or even paternalist turn, there are others which they cannot disregard. Work is hazardous to your health, to borrow a book title. In fact, work is mass murder or genocide. Directly or indirectly, work will kill most of the people who read these words. Between 14,000 and 25,000

Technophilia, An Infantile Disorder

If patriotism is, as Samuel Johnson said, the last refuge of a scoundrel, scientism is by now the first. It's the only ideology which, restated in cyberbabble, projects the look-and-feel of futurity even as it conserves attitudes and values essential to keeping things just as they are. Keep on zapping!

The abstract affirmation of "change" is conservative, not progressive. It privileges all change, apparent or real, stylistic or substantive, reactionary or revolutionary. The more things change -- the more things that change -- the more they stay the same. Faster, faster, Speed Racer! -- (but keep going in circles).

For much the same reason the privileging of progress is also conservative. Progress is the notion that change tends toward improvement and improvement tends to be irreversible. Local setbacks occur as change is stalled or misdirected ("the ether," "phlogiston") but the secular tendency is forward (and secular). Nothing goes very wrong for very long, so there is never any compelling reason not to just keep doing what you're doing. It's gonna be all right. As some jurist once put it in another (but startlingly similar) context, the wheels of justice turn slowly, but they grind fine.

As his pseudonym suggests, Walter Alter is a self-sanctified high priest of progress (but does he know that in German, *alter* means "older"?). He disdains the past the better to perpetuate it. His writing only in small letters -- how modernist! -- was quite the rage when e.e. cummings pioneered it 80 years ago. Perhaps Alter's next advance will be to abandon punctuation

do-humanist experts in job redesign and job enrichment. In addition to shorter hours, “flextime” and the more reliable “safety net” afforded by general food sharing, forager’s work is more satisfying than most modern work. We awaken to the alarm clock; they sleep a lot, night and day. We are sedentary in our buildings in our polluted cities; they move about breathing the fresh air of the open country. We have bosses; they have companions. Our work typically implicates one, or at most a few hyper-specialized skills, if any; theirs combines handwork and brainwork in a versatile variety of activities, exactly as the great utopians called for. Our “commute” is dead time, and unpaid to boot; they cannot even leave the campsite without “reading” the landscape in a potentially productive way. Our children are subject to compulsory school attendance laws; their unsupervised offspring play at adult activities until almost imperceptibly they take their place doing them. They are the makers and masters of their simple yet effective toolkits; we work for our machines, and this will soon be no metaphor, according to an expert from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration: “In general, robots will work for men, but there may be exceptions in which some robots are higher in the hierarchy than some humans.” The last word in equal employment opportunity.

workers are killed annually in this country on the job. Over two million are disabled. Twenty to twenty-five million are injured every year. And these figures are based on a very conservative estimation of what constitutes a work-related injury. Thus they don't count the half million cases of occupational disease every year. I looked at one medical textbook on occupational diseases which was 1,200 pages long. Even this barely scratches the surface. The available statistics count the obvious cases like the 100,000 miners who have black lung disease, of whom 4,000 die every year, a much higher fatality rate than for AIDS, for instance, which gets so much media attention. This reflects the unvoiced assumption that AIDS afflicts perverts who could control their depravity whereas coal-mining is a sacrosanct activity beyond question. What the statistics don't show is that tens of millions of people have their lifespans shortened by work -- which is all that homicide means, after all. Consider the doctors who work themselves to death in their 50's. Consider all the other workaholics.

Even if you aren't killed or crippled while actually working, you very well might be while going to work, coming from work, looking for work, or trying to forget about work. The vast majority of victims of the automobile are either doing one of these work-obligatory activities or else fall afoul of those who do them. To this augmented body-count must be added the victims of auto-industrial pollution and work-induced alcoholism and drug addiction. Both cancer and heart disease are modern afflictions normally traceable, directly, or indirectly, to work.

Work, then, institutionalizes homicide as a way of life. People think the Cambodians were crazy for exterminating themselves, but are we any different? The Pol Pot regime at least had a vision, however blurred, of an egalitarian society. We kill people in the six-figure range (at least) in order to sell Big Macs and Cadillacs to the survivors. Our forty or fifty thousand annual highway fatalities are victims, not martyrs. They died for nothing -- or rather, they died for work. But work is nothing to die for.

Bad news for liberals: regulatory tinkering is useless in this life-and-death context. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration was designed to police the core part of the problem, workplace safety. Even before Reagan and the Supreme Court stifled it, OSHA was a farce. At previous and (by current standards) generous Carter-era funding levels, a workplace could expect a random visit from an OSHA inspector once

every 46 years.

State control of the economy is no solution. Work is, if anything, more dangerous in the state-socialist countries than it is here. Thousands of Russian workers were killed or injured building the Moscow subway. Stories reverberate about covered-up Soviet nuclear disasters which make Times Beach and Three-Mile Island look like elementary-school air-raid drills. On the other hand, deregulation, currently fashionable, won't help and will probably hurt. From a health and safety standpoint, among others, work was at its worst in the days when the economy most closely approximated *laissez-faire*.

Historians like Eugene Genovese have argued persuasively that -- as antebellum slavery apologists insisted -- factory wage-workers in the Northern American states and in Europe were worse off than Southern plantation slaves. No rearrangement of relations among bureaucrats and businessmen seems to make much difference at the point of production. Serious enforcement of even the rather vague standards enforceable in theory by OSHA would probably bring the economy to a standstill. The enforcers apparently appreciate this, since they don't even try to crack down on most malefactors.

What I've said so far ought not to be controversial. Many workers are fed up with work. There are high and rising rates of absenteeism, turnover, employee theft and sabotage, wildcat strikes, and overall goldbricking on the job. There may be some movement toward a conscious and not just visceral rejection of work. And yet the prevalent feeling, universal among bosses and their agents and also widespread among workers themselves is that work itself is inevitable and necessary.

I disagree. It is now possible to abolish work and replace it, insofar as it serves useful purposes, with a multitude of new kinds of free activities. To abolish work requires going at it from two directions, quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand, on the quantitative side, we have to cut down massively on the amount of work being done. At present most work is useless or worse and we should simply get rid of it. On the other hand -- and I think this is the crux of the matter and the revolutionary new departure -- we have to take what useful work remains and transform it into a pleasing variety of game-like and craft-like pastimes, indistinguishable from

and dance together. If this is not Sahlin's original affluent society, it is still an improvement on our allegedly affluent one, workwise. The anthropologist adds that the government has compelled the Kpelle to switch from dry rice-farming to wet (irrigated) rice farming since it is more productive. They demur, but not out of any inherent conservatism: they accepted the advice of the same experts to raise cocoa as a cash crop. The point is that "paddy-rice cultivation will be just plain work without the vital leavening of gossip, singing and dance--the traces of play which have been all but leached out of most modernized work.

As the 80's ended and the 90's commenced, working hours in America, where millions are without work, went up. The new two-income family has a lower standard of living than the one-income family of the 1950's. Housework has hardly been diminished by 20th century technology. Time studies suggest 56 hours of housework a week in 1912; 60 in 1918; 61 for families in 1925. In 1931, college educated housewives in big cities worked 48 hours a week, but by 1965 the average for all housewives was 54 hours, with college educated women putting in 19 more minutes a day than those with grade school educations. By 1977, wives without outside employment worked 50 hours a week, those with jobs, 35 hours excluding wage-work which at 75 hours "adds up to a working week that even sweat shops cannot match." (Cowan 1983)

Primitive productive life was neither nasty nor brutish, nor is it even necessarily short. Significant proportions of San men and women live past age sixty; the population structure is closer to that of the United States than to a typical Third World country. With us, heart disease is the leading cause of death, and stress, a major risk factor, is closely related to job satisfaction. Our sources of stress hardly exist among hunter-gatherers. (Cancer, the second greatest killer, is of course a consequence of industrialization.)

"Working conditions" for hunters can be hazardous, yet civilized work does not even here exhibit a clear superiority, especially when it is recalled that many of the 2 1/2 million American motoring fatalities to date involve one or more participants in wage-work (police, cabbies, teamsters etc) or shadow work like commuting and shopping.

Sahlins had already remarked upon the superior "quality of working life" enjoyed by primitive producers, to borrow a catchphrase from the pseu-

counterpart in 1900. In the eighteenth century a worker ended his days, if he lived so long, in the poor-house; in the twentieth, if he lives so long, in the nursing home, lonely and tortured by medical technology. Progress.

I have saved the worst for last: women's work. Today's working women (most women now work, outside the home, as employees) are worse off working than they have ever been. They still do most of the household work they have done since industrialism, and additionally they do wage-work. Their entry in force into the workforce (they were working all along, but unpaid labor, insane to say, isn't counted as work) in the last twenty years has greatly increased their total toil and, as a result, the total toil altogether (since nobody thinks men are working less). Even if sex discrimination were entirely eradicated, which is far from imminent, equalized women workers would still shoulder an unequal load of what Ilich calls "shadow work," "the consumer's unpaid toil that adds to a commodity an incremental value that is necessary to make this commodity useful to the consuming unit itself." Civil rights laws do not--can not--penetrate the household. The history of work, if it has any evolving logic, is a history of the increasing imposition of exhausting toil on women. Any feminism which is not implacably anti-work is fraudulent.

The world of civilization, the world of history is above all, objectively and subjectively, a world of work. The jury is in on the verdict workers pass on what work means to them, subjectively: it hurts and they hate it. Objectively it just gets worse in terms of the ways it might imaginably get better. Since the late nineteenth century, most work has been "de-skilled," standardized, moronized, fragmented, isolated, policed, and made secure against piratical expropriation. To take and hold even one workplace the workers will have to expropriate them all.

Even hard work could be easier, and easier to take, than the bossed work most of us do. In Liberia the Kpelle, for instance, grow rice, which is work--strenuous work--by any definition. But these "neolithic farmers" conduct their work in a way that the organizers of our work can't or won't even consider. Lii-nee', "joy," axiomatically accompanies any work the Kpelle do or they won't do any. Work is conducted in groups to the accompaniment of musicians whose rhythms pace the strokes of their hoes and machetes. Intermittently a woman throws down her hoe and dances to entertain her companions and relax muscles made sore by repetitious movements. At the end of the day the workers drink palm wine and sing

other pleasurable pastimes, except that they happen to yield useful end-products. Surely that shouldn't make them less enticing to do. Then all the artificial barriers of power and property could come down. Creation could become recreation. And we could all stop being afraid of each other.

I don't suggest that most work is salvageable in this way. But then most work isn't worth trying to save. Only a small and diminishing fraction of work serves any useful purpose independent of the defense and reproduction of the work-system and its political and legal appendages. Twenty years ago, Paul and Percival Goodman estimated that just five percent of the work then being done -- presumably the figure, if accurate, is lower now -- would satisfy our minimal needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Theirs was only an educated guess but the main point is quite clear: directly or indirectly, most work serves the unproductive purposes of commerce or social control. Right off the bat we can liberate tens of millions of salesmen, soldiers, managers, cops, stockbrokers, clergymen, bankers, lawyers, teachers, landlords, security guards, ad-men and everyone who works for them. There is a snowball effect since every time you idle some bigshot you liberate his flunkies and underlings also. Thus the economy implodes.

Forty percent of the workforce are white-collar workers, most of whom have some of the most tedious and idiotic jobs ever concocted. Entire industries, insurance and banking and real estate for instance, consist of nothing but useless paper-shuffling. It is no accident that the "tertiary sector," the service sector, is growing while the "secondary sector" (industry) stagnates and the "primary sector" (agriculture) nearly disappears. Because work is unnecessary except to those whose power it secures, workers are shifted from relatively useful to relatively useless occupations as a measure to assure public order. Anything is better than nothing. That's why you can't go home just because you finish early. They want your time, enough of it to make you theirs, even if they have no use for most of it. Otherwise why hasn't the average work week gone down by more than a few minutes in the past fifty years?

Next we can take a meat-cleaver to production work itself. No more war production, nuclear power, junk food, feminine hygiene deodorant -- and above all, no more auto industry to speak of. An occasional Stanley Steamer or Model-T might be all right, but the auto-eroticism on which

such pestholes as Detroit and Los Angeles depend on is out of the question. Already, without even trying, we've virtually solved the energy crisis, the environmental crisis and assorted other insoluble social problems.

Finally, we must do away with far and away the largest occupation, the one with the longest hours, the lowest pay and some of the most tedious tasks around. I refer to housewives doing housework and child-rearing. By abolishing wage-labor and achieving full unemployment we undermine the sexual division of labor. The nuclear family as we know it is an inevitable adaptation to the division of labor imposed by modern wage-work. Like it or not, as things have been for the last century or two it is economically rational for the man to bring home the bacon, for the woman to do the shitwork to provide him with a haven in a heartless world, and for the children to be marched off to youth concentration camps called "schools," primarily to keep them out of Mom's hair but still under control, but incidentally to acquire the habits of obedience and punctuality so necessary for workers. If you would be rid of patriarchy, get rid of the nuclear family whose unpaid "shadow work," as Ivan Illich says, makes possible the work-system that makes it necessary. Bound up with this no-nukes strategy is the abolition of childhood and the closing of the schools. There are more full-time students than full-time workers in this country. We need children as teachers, not students. They have a lot to contribute to the ludic revolution because they're better at playing than grown-ups are. Adults and children are not identical but they will become equal through interdependence. Only play can bridge the generation gap.

I haven't as yet even mentioned the possibility of cutting way down on the little work that remains by automating and cybernizing it. All the scientists and engineers and technicians freed from bothering with war research and planned obsolescence would have a good time devising means to eliminate fatigue and tedium and danger from activities like mining. Undoubtedly they'll find other projects to amuse themselves with. Perhaps they'll set up world-wide all-inclusive multi-media communications systems or found space colonies. Perhaps. I myself am no gadget freak. I wouldn't care to live in a pushbutton paradise. I don't want robot slaves to do everything; I want to do things myself. There is, I think, a place for labor-saving technology, but a modest place. The historical and pre-historical record is not encouraging. When productive technology went from hunting-gathering to agriculture and on to industry, work increased

continual. Technical progress, as usual, made matters worse. Seamen, for instance, were something of an avant garde of wage-labor. During the eighteenth century, the size of ships and their capacity for cargo greatly increased and the work became heavier and also harder to do. Seamen responded by collective action including strikes--they coined the word, they would strike the sails--mutinies, and the ultimate, piracy, the seizure of the workplace. Pirates simplified the management hierarchy, elected their captains, replaced wages with cooperative ownership and risk-sharing, and vastly reduced the hours of work since a pirate ship had a crew five times larger than the merchantmen they preyed upon. Aversion to work was a main motivation. For one pirate, "the love of Drink and a Lazy Life" were "Stronger Motives with him than Gold." An admiral who impressed some suspected pirates into service on his man-of-war thought to rehabilitate them, "to learn them...working" which "they turned Rogues to avoid." The governor of the Bahamas said, "for work they mortally hate it," and another resident of those islands concurred: "Working does not agree with them." (Rediker, Innes 1988)

It goes without saying that the next turn of the wheel, industrialization, made for more and more monotonous work than workers as a class ever endured before. There were no volunteers in the industrial army. The earliest American factory operatives were not even, in most cases, formally free: they were women and children sent to work by their lawful superiors, their husbands and fathers. The factories of the North, like the plantations of the South, rested, so to speak, on servile labor. For a time, much later, the hours of work did decline as organized labor and assorted reformers made shorter hours a part of their agenda. The eight-hour day which we officially enjoy is the cause for which the Haymarket anarchists of 1886 paid with their lives. But the new deal in legislating a forty hour week scotched proposals by then-Senator Hugo Black (later a Supreme Court Justice) for a thirty hour week and the unions dropped shorter hours from their shopping lists. In recent years, workers have dropped unionization from their shopping list. Everything that goes around, comes around.

Not only have the hours of work not diminished, for all the technological progress of the last half century, the years of our lives devoted to work have actually gone up. The reason is that many more people are living to retirement age, which means that the system is getting more years of work out of us: the average American male works eight more years than his

“Whatever else early America was,” according to recent scholarship, “it was a world of work.” (Innes 1988) Indian America was anything but, as that Roanoke colonist was not the only one to notice. No wonder that he and the others apparently went native, abandoning the earliest English settlement, leaving only a message carved on a tree that they were gone “To Croatan.” These first defectors from civilized toil to barbarous ease were not to be the last. Throughout the colonial period, hundreds of Euro-American agriculturalists joined the Indians or, captured in war, refused to return when peace came. Women and children were inordinately likely to take to the Indian life-style, readily casting off their restrictive roles in white society, but adult males also sought acceptance among the heathen. Without a doubt work was a major motivation for the choices they made. At Jamestown, John Smith enforced a regimen of labor discipline so harsh as to approach concentration camp conditions. In 1613, some of the English were “apointed to be hanged Some burned Some to be broken upon wheles, others to be staked and some to be shott to death.” Their crime? An historian recounts that all “had run away to live with the Indians and had been recaptured.” (Morgan 1975)

The anthropology of work does not suggest any reduction in the quantity or increase in the quality of work in societies of greater complexity. The trend or tendency is rather the other way. The hunt for Virginia Indian men, as for their San counterparts, was more like “sport” than work, but their wives seemed to have worked more than San women if less than their white contemporaries. On the other hand, the gardeners work perhaps even less than the San but some of the work, like weeding and clearing new fields, is more arduous. The watershed, however, is the onset of civilization with its government, cities, and class divisions. Peasants work more because they are compelled to: because they have rents, taxes, and tithes to pay. Later the laboring class pays all that plus profits too which are taken by employers whose interests lie in prolonging and intensifying work. There is, in the words of the Firesign Theatre, “harder work for everyone, and more of it too.” Consider how many weeks of subsistence work an Englishman had to do over the centuries: in 1495, 10; in 1564, 20; in 1684, 48; and in 1726, 52. (Eyer & Sterling, Review of Radical Political Economics Spring 1977) With progress, work worsens.

So it was with the American worker. In the eighteenth century, there was a general trend for labor, slave and free alike, formerly seasonal, to become

while skills and self-determination diminished. The further evolution of industrialism has accentuated what Harry Braverman called the degradation of work. Intelligent observers have always been aware of this. John Stuart Mill wrote that all the labor-saving inventions ever devised haven't saved a moment's labor. Karl Marx wrote that "it would be possible to write a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class." The enthusiastic technophiles -- Saint-Simon, Comte, Lenin, B. F. Skinner -- have always been unabashed authoritarians also; which is to say, technocrats. We should be more than sceptical about the promises of the computer mystics. They work like dogs; chances are, if they have their way, so will the rest of us. But if they have any particularized contributions more readily subordinated to human purposes than the run of high tech, let's give them a hearing.

What I really want to see is work turned into play. A first step is to discard the notions of a "job" and an "occupation." Even activities that already have some ludic content lose most of it by being reduced to jobs which certain people, and only those people are forced to do to the exclusion of all else. Is it not odd that farm workers toil painfully in the fields while their air-conditioned masters go home every weekend and putter about in their gardens? Under a system of permanent revelry, we will witness the Golden Age of the dilettante which will put the Renaissance to shame. There won't be any more jobs, just things to do and people to do them.

The secret of turning work into play, as Charles Fourier demonstrated, is to arrange useful activities to take advantage of whatever it is that various people at various times in fact enjoy doing. To make it possible for some people to do the things they could enjoy it will be enough just to eradicate the irrationalities and distortions which afflict these activities when they are reduced to work. I, for instance, would enjoy doing some (not too much) teaching, but I don't want coerced students and I don't care to suck up to pathetic pedants for tenure.

Second, there are some things that people like to do from time to time, but not for too long, and certainly not all the time. You might enjoy baby-sitting for a few hours in order to share the company of kids, but not as much as their parents do. The parents meanwhile, profoundly appreciate the time to themselves that you free up for them, although they'd get fret-

ful if parted from their progeny for too long. These differences among individuals are what make a life of free play possible. The same principle applies to many other areas of activity, especially the primal ones. Thus many people enjoy cooking when they can practice it seriously at their leisure, but not when they're just fueling up human bodies for work.

Third -- other things being equal -- some things that are unsatisfying if done by yourself or in unpleasant surroundings or at the orders of an overlord are enjoyable, at least for a while, if these circumstances are changed. This is probably true, to some extent, of all work. People deploy their otherwise wasted ingenuity to make a game of the least inviting drudge-jobs as best they can. Activities that appeal to some people don't always appeal to all others, but everyone at least potentially has a variety of interests and an interest in variety. As the saying goes, "anything once." Fourier was the master at speculating how aberrant and perverse penchants could be put to use in post-civilized society, what he called Harmony. He thought the Emperor Nero would have turned out all right if as a child he could have indulged his taste for bloodshed by working in a slaughterhouse. Small children who notoriously relish wallowing in filth could be organized in "Little Hordes" to clean toilets and empty the garbage, with medals awarded to the outstanding. I am not arguing for these precise examples but for the underlying principle, which I think makes perfect sense as one dimension of an overall revolutionary transformation. Bear in mind that we don't have to take today's work just as we find it and match it up with the proper people, some of whom would have to be perverse indeed. If technology has a role in all this it is less to automate work out of existence than to open up new realms for re/creation. To some extent we may want to return to handicrafts, which William Morris considered a probable and desirable upshot of communist revolution. Art would be taken back from the snobs and collectors, abolished as a specialized department catering to an elite audience, and its qualities of beauty and creation restored to integral life from which they were stolen by work. It's a sobering thought that the grecian urns we write odes about and showcase in museums were used in their own time to store olive oil. I doubt our everyday artifacts will fare as well in the future, if there is one. The point is that there's no such thing as progress in the world of work; if anything it's just the opposite. We shouldn't hesitate to pilfer the past for what it has to offer, the ancients lose nothing yet we are enriched.

week or two, it's a waste of effort to get another one, and what else is there to do but swap stories?" The poor devils are too rich to work. Cruelly denied the opportunity to accumulate capital, what else is there for the benighted savages to do but create, converse, dance, sing, feast and fuck? (Liberty May 1989)

Behind Steele's braying ethnocentrism is a fear of wildness and wilderness, a yearning fear for the call from the Forest, a fear of freedom itself.

Foragers like the San and the Australians are not the only prosperous primitives with ample leisure. Gardeners who practice shifting ("slash and burn") cultivation work a lot less than we moderns. In the Philippines the horticultural Hanunoo annually devote 500 to 1000 hours to the subsistence activity that sustains one adult. At the higher figure, that works out to less than 2 hours and 45 minutes a day. Gardening, augmented by hunting and gathering was the mode of production among most of the Indians in eastern North America when the Europeans arrived. The clash of cultures has been regarded from many perspectives, but not as insistently as it should be as a collision between worlds of work.

Far from living hand-to-mouth, the Indians produced a surplus--had they not, the settlers would have starved at Jamestown and Plymouth. Far from exhausting themselves scrounging for survival, the impression the Indians left on early English observers like Captain John Smith was that their life was a paradise of all but workless plenty. He thought the settlers might enjoy a three-day workweek featuring the "pretty sport" of fishing. In 1643, the magistrates of Massachusetts Bay received the submission of two Rhode Island sachems. "Giving them to understand upon what terms they must be received under us," as Governor John Winthrop put it, the Indians were told "Not to do any unnecessary workd on the Lord's day within the gates of proper towns." Not to worry, replied the sachems: "It is a small thing for us to rest on that day, for we have not much to do any day, and therefore we will forbear on that day."

According to one of the Roanoke colonists, to feed one Virginia Indian enough corn for a year required annually 24 hours of work. (Morgan 1975) (Of course the Indians ate more than corn; New England Indians enjoyed an abundant, varied "diet for superb health," more nutritious and less monotonous than what became standard fare in, say, the back country of the South; or in later industrial tenements.

so sorry as the majority of married women working for wages or salaries in addition to the housework they always did--and at levels of pay which still reflect sexual inequality.

Lee's later figures strengthen the affluence thesis in other ways--for instance, caloric intake, previously underestimated, is upped to a more than adequate level. The surplus is stored as body fat against occasional shortages, fed to the dogs or consumed to sustain people's efforts at all-night trance-healing dances occurring one to four times a month. And despite the staggering variety of plant and animal sources in their diet, the San do not eat many items which other peoples find edible. Their work yields them so many consumer goods that the San as a society can and do exercise consumer choice. To assign such societies to the category "subsistence economy" is not only foolish phraseology--what economy is not a subsistence economy?--as Pierre Clastres argues, it passes an adverse value judgment in the guise of a statement of fact. The implication is that these societies have failed to be other than what they are, as if it were unthinkable anybody might prefer a leisurely life bereft of bosses, priests, princes and paupers. The San have a choice. In the 1960's and 1970's, amidst a worsening political situation in Botswana and neighboring Namibia, many San gave up foraging for employment by Bantu cattle ranchers or South African farmers. All along they were able but not willing to work for wages.

As Ivan Illich observes, "Economists understand about work about as much as alchemists about gold." In positing as twin fatalities infinite wants and finite (scarce) resources they erect a dismal science on axioms every sensible person rejects out of hand. By their lifeways the hunter-gatherers give the lie to the Hobbesian hoax. Resources are bountiful and the San consume them with gusto, but since they are rational hedonists, not ascetic madmen, the San find satisfaction in satiety: they have worked enough if there is plenty for everybody. So scandalous are the foragers for the economists and their addicts that they call forth paroxysms of pulpit-thumping prejudice, notably by libertarian economist Murray Rothbard and, in a hostile review of my book espousing the abolition of work, David Ramsey Steele. Liberty (as it styles itself) suppressed 90% of my rejoinder to Steele. Let me retaliate by quoting him only in quoting myself:

Steele, with unintended humor, explains why hunter-gatherers loaf most of the time: "If you have one animal carcass to keep you going for the next

The reinvention of daily life means marching off the edge of our maps. There is, it is true, more suggestive speculation than most people suspect. Besides Fourier and Morris -- and even a hint, here and there, in Marx -- there are the writings of Kropotkin, the syndicalists Pataud and Pouget, anarcho-communists old (Berkman) and new (Bookchin). The Goodman brothers' *Communitas* is exemplary for illustrating what forms follow from given functions (purposes), and there is something to be gleaned from the often hazy heralds of alternative/appropriate/intermediate/convivial technology, like Schumacher and especially Illich, once you disconnect their fog machines. The situationists -- as represented by Vaneigem's *Revolution of Daily Life* and in the *Situationist International Anthology* -- are so ruthlessly lucid as to be exhilarating, even if they never did quite square the endorsement of the rule of the worker's councils with the abolition of work. Better their incongruity, though than any extant version of leftism, whose devotees look to be the last champions of work, for if there were no work there would be no workers, and without workers, who would the left have to organize?

So the abolitionists would be largely on their own. No one can say what would result from unleashing the creative power stultified by work. Anything can happen. The tiresome debater's problem of freedom vs. necessity, with its theological overtones, resolves itself practically once the production of use-values is coextensive with the consumption of delightful play-activity.

Life will become a game, or rather many games, but not -- as it is now -- a zero/sum game. An optimal sexual encounter is the paradigm of productive play. The participants potentiate each other's pleasures, nobody keeps score, and everybody wins. The more you give, the more you get. In the ludic life, the best of sex will diffuse into the better part of daily life. Generalized play leads to the libidinization of life. Sex, in turn, can become less urgent and desperate, more playful. If we play our cards right, we can all get more out of life than we put into it; but only if we play for keeps.

No one should ever work. Workers of the world... relax!

Primitive Affluence

A Postscript to Sahlins

“The Original Affluent Society” by Marshall Sahlins is an essay of wide-ranging erudition whose persuasive power largely derives from two extended examples: the Australian Aborigines and the !Kung Bushmen. The Australian instance, omitted here, is developed from a variety of 19th and 20th century written sources. The data on the Bushmen--or San, as they call themselves--were the result of fieldwork in the early 1960's by Richard Borshay Lee, an anthropologist. Lee has subsequently published a full monograph on work in a !Kung San band in which he augments, recalculates and further explains the statistics relied on by Sahlins. As finally marshalled the evidence supports the affluence thesis more strongly than ever--and includes a couple of surprises.

“Why should we plant,” asks Lee's informant/Xashe, “when there are so many mongongos in the world?” Why indeed? Originally, Lee studied the San equivalent of what is conventionally accounted work in industrial society--hunting and gathering in their case, wage labor in ours. This was the comparison Sahlins cited. In terms of our standard eight-hour work-day, a San adult works between 2.2 and 2.4 hours a day--well below the provisional four hour figure Sahlins references. Not that the San work a seven- or even a five-day week at these ludicrously low levels of labor, for they spend “less than half their days in subsistence and enjoy more leisure time than the members of many agricultural and industrial societies.” For many Lee might better have said any. More often than not a !Kung San is visiting friends and kin at other camps or receiving them in his own.

Upon returning to the field, Lee broadened his definition of work to encompass all “those activities that contribute to the direct appropriation of food,

water or materials from the environment”--adding to subsistence activity tool-making and fixing and housework (mainly food preparation). These activities didn't increase the San workload as much as their equivalents in our sort of society increase ours--relatively we fall even further behind. Per diem the manufacture and maintenance of tools takes 64 minutes for men, 45 minutes for women. “Housework” for the San means mostly cracking nuts, plus cooking--most adults of both sexes and older children crack their own mongongo nuts, the only activity where women do more work than men: 2.2 hours a day for men, 3.2 hours for women. Nor are these figures fudged by unreported child labor. Until about age fifteen San children do virtually no work, and if they are female they continue to do little work until marriage, which may be some years later. Our adolescents fare worse at McDonald's, not to forget that women and children comprised the workforce for the brutal beginnings of industrialization in Britain and America.

It is often asserted that in most societies women work more than men and this is probably, in general, true. In a perhaps not unrelated development, women in all known societies wield less political power than men, in fact usually none whatsoever. A thoughtfully strategic feminism should therefore eventuate in anarchism, not in fantasies of matriarchal table-turning; and in the abolition of work, not in caterwauling for equal pay for equal work. The only mathematically certain way to equalize, gender-wise, government and work is to get rid of both of them. In San society, however, men work more than women. Men do one-third more subsistence work than women, although they provide only 40% of caloric intake.

When the full tally of work as Lee expansively defines it is taken, the average workweek is 44.5 hours for men, 40.1 hours for women.

Lee's original figures relied on by Sahlins were startling enough, but the later data enhance their value by allowing comparisons of housework as well as subsistence work. Our world of work has a dirty secret: wage-work rests on the indispensable prop of unpaid “shadow work.” (Illich 1981) The arduous toil of housewives--cleaning, cooking, shopping, childcare--is so much uncompensated drudgery literally unaccounted for in statistics on work. With us as much as with the San such work is usually women's work, to a much greater extent among us. How many husbands perform even two hours of housework a day? How many wives, like their San counterparts, less than three? Nor does San society exhibit any sight