Original Article

Labor of recombination

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Abstract Much of Marxist theory rests on the assumption that workers experience exploitation as individuals, and that the rate of exploitation (as a unit of time) can be calculated on a per-worker basis. Yet this calculation breaks down when dealing with cybertime and post-human bodies. Even as capital restructures the mode of production, labor continues to resurrect the ghosts of an idealized past that may or may not have actually existed. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari view subjectivity principally as a molar event or a form of closure, Bifo elaborates on their concept of subjectivation as an open, molecular becoming, which no longer hinges on the subject. Drawing upon both Bifo and his intellectual forbears, I will expand upon the idea of subjectivation as it relates to labor. Beginning with the assumption that the labor movement, broadly defined, remains an important site of contestation, I will ask the question: What strategies and political (non)-forms become possible as immaterial, acorporeal labor becomes the dominant mode of production?
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Introduction

At the end of his famous 'Postscript on Societies of Control', Gilles Deleuze (1996) poses an open-ended question about the future of the labor movement: 'One of the most important questions will concern the ineptitude of the unions: tied to the whole of their history of struggle against the disciplines or within the spaces of enclosure, will they be able to adapt themselves or will they give way to new forms of resistance against the societies of control'? While the 'Postscript' has been dissected and analyzed by numerous commentators and critics, the fleeting mention of trade unionism has gone almost unnoticed. The question is left unanswered, and

Deleuze abandons this line of inquiry almost immediately, so the reader is forced to speculate. Yet its characterization as 'one of the most important questions' indicates that Deleuze believed a labor movement – or something like it – would be a crucial mode of resistance in the emergent society of control.

To be sure, Deleuze is not considered a theorist of the labor movement, and like most of the post-1968 generation, regarded actually existing trade unionism as ideologically and politically moribund. As is well known, the French trade unions initially sought to destroy the popular uprising of May 1968 before halfheartedly lending their tentative support, only to withdraw it again when the situation reached a breaking point. Thus for many, the Parisian 1968 and subsequent the Italian Hot Autumn seemed to sound the death knell for unions as authentic organs of struggle. Indeed, Deleuze's two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, co-written with Felix Guattari in the immediate aftermath of May 1968 (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), might be read as an effort to reinvent a radical politics outside of the conventions of the Old Left. But unlike some of his contemporaries, Deleuze never fully abandoned his Marxist training – even if he espoused an extreme heterodox Marxism – and remained convinced that the mode of production would remain a fundamental site of contestation under late capitalism (c.f. Thoburn, 2003).

To reframe the question: Can unions adjust their tactics for doing battle a new enemy – the modern corporation – that often appears as a 'spirit' or a 'gas'? Can unions shed their molar skins and metamorphose into new creatures adequate to the contemporary world? Or should they be consigned to the dustbin of disciplinary society, to be replaced by new (non)-forms better suited to the vicissitudes of the society of control? This essay will explore this question and sketch out some possibilities. These will not take the form of concrete programmatic recommendations, or worse, policy prescriptions, but rather some general observations on the relationship of the labor movement to the changing mode of production. In this sense, it speaks in a different register than most academic writing on the labor movement, whose narrow policy-orientation confines it to a myopic presentism.

Beyond the Disciplinary Analog(ue)

For Deleuze, disciplinary society is comprised of the institutions of enclosure – principally the prison, the hospital, the factory, the school and the family. These sites are homologous but largely self-contained, and impose order from above. Interestingly, Deleuze does not include the labor movement on this list, even though he later claims it is bound up in this regime. He could easily have made the case – as others have done – that labor unions are *themselves* disciplinary institutions (see, for example, Zerzan, 1974). In contrast, control societies are characterized by diffuse power, which is distributed rather than embodied in

fixed organizations. The walls of the beleaguered institutions of discipline have been torn down, but their ghosts have colonized civil society. The object of control is no longer the human body or even an amalgamation of individuals, but the population itself, which is called into being through statistics. If disciplinary power was exacting and precise it was at least intelligible. Control society may be less blatantly repressive, but its power operates in ways that are both more totalizing and less legible, and therefore more insidious. The society of control exercises its power 'thanks to the technologies of the action at a distance of image, sound and data which function like machines to modulate, to crystallize electromagnetic waves and vibrations or to modulate and crystallize packets of bits' (Lazzarato, 2006, p. 185). Yet crucially, as Deleuze took pains to point out, control society does not completely replace disciplinary society even as the former becomes dominant, rather, disciplinary possibilities persist under the surface of control. Obviously, the institutions of discipline remain alive and well, but they are declining in *relative* importance as control society redistributes power in new ways.

Yet this model hinges on a crude historiography – a simple periodization of social time into epochs that are more or less distinct and asynchronous. But it may be illuminating to reimagine an achronological history, where each era already contains the incipient beginnings of those yet to come – and the carcasses of those that preceded it. If the Fordist factory was the paradigmatic disciplinary institution of the modern era, it coexisted alongside decidedly non-Fordist assemblages: timber camps, migrant farmwork, domestic labor. In this sense, the conventional labor union, which found its symmetrical antagonist in the Fordist factory – has always been inadequate to industries characterized by heavy turnover and dispersed or mobile production. And these non-Fordist work relations portended the abandonment of the only regime the unions were capable of contending with.

If labor unions are products of disciplinary society and remain wedded to its institutions, how will they fare as the discipline becomes obsolete? Franco 'Bifo' Berardi takes up this question where Deleuze left off. For Bifo, the decline of the mass worker has rendered any 'permanent social organization' obsolete. Hence, the question of organization must be taken up anew. Under a regime of precarity, 'the problem of the autonomous organization of labor must be completely rethought' (Berardi, 2009, p. 148). True to form, Bifo offers few practical recommendations in this regard, consigning the movement, like Deleuze, to an open-ended and indeterminate future: 'We still do not know in which way this organization can be constructed: this is the main political problem of the future' (ibid.). At times, he appears impossibly pessimistic about possibilities for worker resistance under control society:

> … the forms of resistance and of struggle that were efficacious in the twentieth century no longer appear to have the capacity to spread and

> consolidate themselves, nor consequently can they stop the absolutism of capital. An experience that derives from workers' struggle in recent years is that the struggle of precarious workers does not make a cycle. Fractalized work can also punctually rebel, but this does not set into motion any wave of struggle … In order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of the bodies of labor and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for the cellularized bodies to become community. No wave can be created, because the workers do not share their existence in time, and behaviors can only become a wave when there is a continuous proximity in time that info-labor no longer allows. (Berardi, 2009, p. 34)

Following Marx, Bifo here suggests that a physical contact and networks of communication between laborers is a necessary precondition for collective action. If precarious workers lack this interpersonal engagement, they are incapable of constituting a movement. Yet at other moments in the same text he appears far more enthusiastic, positioning a re-purposed labor movement as uniquely capable of resisting the capitalist offensive. 'Only a movement of researchers, a high tech labor movement of the cognitariat that is autonomously organized can stop the dictatorship of financial corporations' (2009, p. 59). How to explain this apparent discrepancy?

The easiest explanation is that 'the cognitariat' and 'precarious workers' refer to two distinct groups, of which only the cognitariat is capable of organization. Bifo never fully explains the relationship between the cognitariat and precarious labor, but it seems clear that these groups are somewhat distinct, if overlapping. The other, more interesting explanation is that Bifo believe the labor movement of the future will require a re-imagining of collective action *as such* – thus his insistence in the first passage that 'fractalized work … does not set in motion any wave of struggle'. It is this second possibility that I wish to examine more closely.

Post-Collectivist Futures

Unions typically imagine themselves as collective entities that are constitutive of, but greater than, the sum of their parts. For the labor movement (and most twentieth-century social movements), collective action requires a coming-together at the supra-individual level, and the concomitant subordination of individual desire to the collective will of the group. Almost as soon as the individual emerged as a distinct ontological entity in Western political thought, it had been subsumed within various versions of 'the collective', whether through its liberal permutations (Nation, Citizen, Public) or its radical

manifestations (Party, Union, Masses, Proletariat, People). For some, this constant and unresolved tension between the individual and the collective is the essential condition of the social world.

Yet a close reading of Deleuze suggests a different path. For Deleuze, control society replaces the individual with a new entity – the 'dividual' – which resides *below* the level of the individual, on a sub-individual plane. Dividuals are deeply encoded masses, samples, data or markets that exist *immediately* at the level of mathematically constructed populations (as opposed to individuals, which, as conventional thought would have it, exist in the first instance as corporeal entities and only secondarily as statistical algorithms). Crucially, the dividual is not a mere representation or mediation, but offers direct access to the social. While the collective is reducible to the sum of its parts (individuals), the individual is never reducible to dividualism, nor is there a one-to-one correspondence between the individual and the dividual, because the two exist on separate ontological planes.

The implications for labor are tremendous. Under traditional employment relations, capital purchased fully embodied labor power via the corporeal worker for fixed lengths of time, which were known in advance and precisely measured. Yet this Apollonian calculus immediately confronts the Dionysian chaos of informal worker resistance, which shatters the working day and renders the time–motion study useless. But under post-Fordism, this drive has been partially recuperated. Today, 'capital no longer recruits people, but buys packets of time, separated from their interchangeable and occasional bearers […] who make it available to the recombinative cyber-productive circuit. The time of work is fractalized, that is, reduced to minimal fragments that can be reassembled, and the fractalization makes it possible for capital to constantly find the conditions of minimum salary' (Berardi, 2009, p. 32). There is a long-standing debate over whether the switch to fractalized work and micro-labor invalidates the Labor Theory of Value. Much of Marxist theory rests on the assumption that workers experience exploitation as individuals, and that the rate of exploitation (as a unit of time) can be calculated on a per-worker basis, even if in the famous section from the *Grundrisse* (1974) known as the Fragment on Machines, Marx apparently calls into question his own theory. This is not the place to rehash the terms of this debate, except to note that the fragmentation and disembodiment of work renders the calculations that would affirm the labor theory of value highly complex, and in some cases, mathematically impossible. Significantly, for Bifo, this trend applies not only to the high-tech industries or those who work with computers, but everywhere.

Just as time is divided into tiny units, the worker experiences dissolution as a bounded subject. As Bifo writes, 'The worker does not exist anymore as a person. He is just the interchangeable producer of microfragments of recombinant semiosis which enters into the continuous flux of the network'

(2009, p. 38). While Harry Braverman and other labor process theorists long ago pointed out that capital regards employees as interchangeable components in the machine of production, Bifo moves far beyond the Braverman thesis in suggesting that the worker-as-person has already been written out of the equation. Cultural theorist Alexander Galloway recently asserted with no hint of exaggeration, 'the mode of production [under post-Fordism] is math' (Galloway, 2010). Today, living labor is folded into minute mathematical calculations to the point that the two are inseparable. To be sure, mathematics has always been integrated with production, but if the Fordist-Taylorist regime was characterized by elementary school math (counting, measuring and averaging), post-Fordism is based on higher-order statistical manipulations (probability, algorithms and code). If the age-old dream of the labor radicals was to rescue the worker from wage slavery (understood as an imposition from above), how to free a population that has already been constituted as a set of data points on a logistic curve?

To imagine a movement of dividuals is to imagine a politics beyond subjectivity. While Deleuze and Guattari view *subjectivity* principally as a molar event or a form of closure, Bifo elaborates on their concept of *subjectivation* as an open, molecular becoming, which no longer hinges on the bounded subject. As Bifo writes, 'the formative process … resembles much more a chemical composition than the mechanical accumulation of organizational forms. There is an implicit critique of political subjectivism and, at the same time, a critique of empirical sociology' (2009, p. 143). If subjectivity is inextricably linked to the individual-collective dyad, and thus largely incompatible with dividuals, subjectivation is free from the fetters of mainstream political thought, and thus fully compatible with the sub-individual level. But at a practical level, few actually existing formations have embraced the post-collectivist imperative. The vast majority of workers in the high-tech sectors remain unorganized, and info-laborers have never organized successfully. The Communication Workers of America has sponsored a marginally successful campaign to organize programmers at Microsoft, but this is the exception that proves the rule. A movement of dividuals will likely make a sharp break with the past, and may bear little resemblance to what we today understand as a labor union.

Insecure Attachments

As info-labor becomes the dominant mode of production, the worker experiences an increase in precarity. For Bifo, 'Precariousness is no longer a marginal and provisional characteristic, but it is the general form of the labor relation in a productive, digitalized sphere, reticular and recombinative' (2009, p. 51). This is not to say that all workers experience precarity equally, or that

precaritization is the dominant trend in all workplaces, but that becoming precarious is the emergent future of the global labor market, taken as a whole. Just as Hardt and Negri argued that immaterial labor represents the 'cutting edge' of capitalist restructuring even if many jobs are not yet immaterial, a similar argument could be made about precaritization. But as previously noted, info-labor is not confined to computer technicians or employees of technology firms. Increasingly, the primary site of info-labor is not the high-tech workplace, but the Internet itself, where websites draw upon 'micro-labor', which generates surplus value primarily through advertising revenue.

But faced with increasing precarity and insecurity, the labor movement can do nothing but look backward. The rallying call of the labor movement in the face of the segmentation and disruption of continuous labor time has been 'We Want Job Security!' This is a grave mistake. Unlike much of the Left, Bifo is crystal clear on one point: those who oppose the worst effects of precarity should not demand its opposite. Reflecting briefly on new political forms, he asks rhetorically, '… what would our proposed objective be? That of a stable job, guaranteed for life? Naturally no, this would be a cultural regression …' (2009, p. 31). Capital has reneged on its end of the social contract; to wish it back is futile at best, reactionary at worst.

Nonetheless, the response of the labor movement, in all too many cases, has been to cling to what is left of the social guarantee. As Bifo argues, the demand for job security is a conservative demand, in both the political sense and in the sense that it is inherently backward looking. To demand security is to demand the reterritorialization of the employment relation. At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that job security has everywhere disappeared. Job security persists, and not only for the most privileged workers in the professional strata. Indeed, the demand for job security persists precisely because it remains – at least for some workers – winnable. But there is a generalized slippage toward precarity, even for the most privileged of workers. As Guattari and Negri (1996) predict, in the near future 'the guaranteed workers will be placed under the same regime as the non-guaranteed, and everything will be nuances, minute non-empirical transitions'. For many, job security seems to be the last remaining hope for avoiding this nightmarish endgame.

The turn toward job security has at least two deleterious effects on the labor movement. First, job security is often a *de facto* replacement for wage, hour and benefit demands. Unions that might otherwise win tangible improvements for their members instead find themselves clinging to the life raft of employment stability during moments of economic crisis. Second, the 'threat' of layoffs causes unions to negotiate abnormally long contracts. Speaking to the American Council on Education in 1995, no sharper a social critic than former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan noted 'workers have increasingly forgone

wage hikes for job security. Moreover, labor contracts … are now sometimes going out five and six years, as people try to lock in job security …' (quoted in Cutler, 2004). Most labor specialists agree that long contracts severely undermine labor's power by eliminating the possibility of job actions during the interim. (In the United States, most collective bargaining agreements include a no strike clause for the duration of the contract.) Job security is nothing more than an anti-concessionary demand, since by definition a union's members already have jobs. At best, job security is a purely defensive demand. At worst, it is the precursor to givebacks, since job security is often tied to concessionary bargaining.

Precarity also operates at the subconscious level. Even workers who do not experience precarity directly often feel threatened by the specter of precarity, and fear they may soon become precarious themselves. Even when the economic cycle turns in workers' favor, the *perceived* threat of layoffs leads to decreased militancy. Whether this fear has any relationship bearing on the 'actual' stability of the workers is irrelevant; it is the fear itself that is productive for capital. The calculus is simple: the precarious worker is less likely to rebel or unionize for fear of retribution and if unionized is less likely to make aggressive demands. The ideal worker believes each working day may be his last. From the standpoint of capital, it matters little whether precarity is real or imagined – in fact, an imagined precarity is usually preferable because high turnover incurs significant retraining expenses.

Still, the demand for job security is rooted in the collective imagination, which has a notoriously long phase cycle. For a period of about 30 years (roughly, from the end of World War II through the oil crisis of the 1970s), job security was a reality for many workers in the highly industrialized countries of the Western world. In the United States, this took the form of a *de facto* agreement under which capital would grant steady if modest wage increases in exchange for relative labor peace. This arrangement, often called the post-war social contract, substantially improved the quality of life for significant segments of the working class, to the point that by the 1960s it was possible to speak of a post-scarcity society in parts of Western Europe. But this is a historically and spatially unique phenomenon; precarity has been the lived reality for vast majority of workers since the advent of capitalism. Even the post-war deal was extended only to a privileged sector of the working class; workers outside of major factories and portions of the managerial/professional strata typically endured precarity. (Incidentally, pre-capitalist and primitive accumulation economies typically offered some degree of job security.) As Bifo writes, 'Only for a short period at the heart of the twentieth century, under the political pressures of unions and workers, in conditions of (almost) full employment and thanks to a more or less strongly regulatory role of the state in the economy, some limits to the natural violence of capitalist dynamics could be legally established' (2009, p. 32). With the decline of the labor movement

globally by the 1980s, the violence of capital could no longer be held in check, and the guarantee was replaced – perhaps permanently – by precarity. But this 30-year exception looms large in the memories and collective imagination of the contemporary workforce. The baby-boom generation is the last to have experienced relative security. What Bifo calls the video-electronic generation (born after the late 1970s) and the connective generation (born in the 1990s) have no direct knowledge of secure employment, even if they desire it for themselves. Even workers born as early as the 1960s know security only vicariously, through their parents. Yet workers and their unions continue to relive the collective memory of an experience they have never known.

The reaction of French unions to the threat of precarity is instructive here. In 2006, French workers and students revolted against a law that would have allowed firms to fire young workers without reason during the first 2 years of employment. This anti-CPE (*Contrat Première Embauche* or 'First Employment Contract') movement involved a broad cross-section of society and represented one of the largest and most militant demonstrations in France since 1968. In typical fashion, unions resisted precaritization by resurrecting the ghosts of job security. Unions led the chant 'CPE, no, no, no', and 'CDI, yes, yes, yes'. (CDI is the Contrat à Durée Indéterminée or 'Undetermined Duration Contract', the typical mode of employment in France.) For these unions, the reterritorialization of the employment relation was the only possible response to precarity. But others had a different slogan. A banner above the occupied College of France read 'CPE or CDI, it's all just forced labor (STO)' (*Service du Travail Obligatoire or* 'Obligatory Labor Service'). A communiqué from the occupation committee declared the union's slogan was 'an expression of the servile desire to be exploited for 8 hours every day like everybody else', and the occupiers slogan 'a refusal to let work define us, a refusal to let it penetrate to ever further depths of our being' (Anonymous, 2006). Caught between the Scylla of an uncertain future and the Charybdis of unending labor, the occupation committee demanded a third option.

As this example shows, the labor movement may find it necessary to develop a new subjectivity beyond work. But unions, like most large bureaucracies, are often characterized by outright resistance to change. As Maurizio Lazzarato observes, French unions actively opposed including unskilled workers among their ranks as late as the 1980s (2006, p. 187). In the United States, no union has mounted a real campaign to organize Wal-Mart, even as numerous studies have shown the company has a disproportionate downward influence on wages across multiple sectors of the economy (Kelber, 2011). According to Lazzarato (2006, p. 190), 'the labor movement … can't imagine a process of constitution of the world and self which is not centered around work'. But this is the crucial condition for labor's reinvention.

Suicide is Painless

This emergent movement will not be a new form of activism, but a strategy of radical passivity. In the first instance, the strategy is predicated on the abandonment of preassigned subject-positions: the rejection of work by the worker, the rank-and-file's withdrawal from the trade unions, and the rebel's escape from the role of ascetic militant – in short, a strategy of desubjectivation. As Bifo writes, 'the path towards the autonomy of the social from economic and military mobilization [is] only possible through a withdrawal into inactivity, silence and passive sabotage' (2009, p. 127). This will draw upon what I might call Frederick Taylor's Fourth Law of Thermodynamics: the general tendency of workers to perform as little work as possible, in a closed system, in the absence of an external force. While unions seek to cement workers' identities *as workers*, most workers identify with a non-worker subjectivity, which is ironically far more compatible with the contemporary mode of production (Of course, some unions recast their members as citizen-consumers or embrace identity politics in the name of diversity, but ultimately seek to realign difference in the service of worker-identity.) (Schwartz-Weinstein, 2010). Thus, if the refusal of work was the cause of precaritization, it also represents a path forward. Elements of knowledge, already the province of the General Intellect, can be reassembled for uses that undermine the capitalist profit-generating prerogative. For Bifo, the primary tactic of the labor movement of the future will be a form of sabotage that he calls the *recombinant function*: 'The problem of our time is the creation of a recombinant function … Recombining does not mean to subvert or to overthrow … but rather means assembling elements of knowledge according to criteria other than those of profit and the accumulation of value' (2009, p. 66). The conventional mode of struggle, where capital and labor constituted themselves as frontal opponents, is no longer possible, because the enemy has become more totalizing. The recombinant function is guerrilla warfare for labor, hearkening back to the refusal of work, sabotage, stealing time and other tactics of Italian autonomist left. The immediate objective is not to seize the means of production, but to carve out a space for freedom from within through a radical re-purposing.

Bifo suggests that this political subjectivation will occur at the boundary of cyberspace and cybertime, which exhibit different and fundamentally incompatible characteristics: 'cyberspace is conceptually infinite, cybertime is not infinite at all. I call cybertime the ability of the conscious organism to actually process (cyber-spatial) information. This ability cannot be indefinitely expanded, because it has limits that are physical, emotional, affective. Time becomes the primary battlefield, as it is the space of the mind: mind-time, cybertime'. For the labor movement, the 'battlefield of time' has traditionally taken the form of the shorter hours movement, which by the mid-twentieth century had largely succeeded in reducing a virtually limitless workday to 7 or 8 hours in

North America and Europe. But this movement achieved its greatest success in the manufacturing sector, where the employment relations remained relatively stable and the labor theory of value appeared unshakable. In the service sector, where employment relations have always been more tenuous, the hours question is rarely broached. For cognitive and high-tech workers, for all intents and purposes, there is no hours question. Yet the beauty of the shorter hours movement is that its internal logic is not dependent on the labor theory of value (Cutler and Aronowitz, 1998). Tech workers need not be able to calculate the portion of their working day that is converted into relative surplus value to reduce the amount of time they spend doing their jobs.

But importantly, the objective of the recombinant function is not 'to bring to the surface a hidden social authenticity' lurking beneath the oppressive conditions of the modern workplace (Berardi, 2009, p. 66). As far as Bifo is concerned, there is no essential authenticity to be uncovered. In contrast, the early shorter hours movement was often justified on Neo-Luddite grounds – by freeing himself [sic] from the emasculating roar of the factory, the worker could reclaim his 'essential humanness' and achieve complete human development. At certain moments, Bifo's writing appears as a faint echo of the early shorter hours movement: 'It is only by freeing the cognitariat from the subordination to its virtual dimension, it is only by reactivating a dynamic of slow affectivity, of freedom from work, that the collective organism will be able to regain its sensibility and rationality, its ability to live in peace' (2009, p. 71). But Bifo is careful to note that he is not seeking to recapture the purely erotic *à la* Marcuse and the Marxist humanists. The molar/corporeal/individual subject cannot be 'reclaimed' outside of and in opposition to technology. As Bifo has argued, not only is this path undesirable, but it may well be impossible. Humanity has already been so deeply transformed by and through technology that the 'authentically human' can no longer be neatly separated from the 'purely technological'.

Instead, Bifo outlines three possible responses to capitalist restructuring: *deceleration, upgrading* and *subtraction*. Deceleration would involve a reduction of complexity, perhaps for the purpose of reclaiming the 'authentically human'. As already indicated, Bifo believes this is not a viable option. Upgrading, or 'mechanical adjustment of the human body and brain to a hyperfast info-sphere' through use of computer prostheses and drugs is technically possible, though not necessarily desirable (2009, p. 43). This leaves subtraction – 'distancing from the vortex', or what Bifo calls suicide. At times, this refers to actual suicide, at other points, it operates at the level of metaphor. Bifo explains, 'Since September 11th, 2001 suicide is the decisive political act of our times. When human life is worthless, humiliation grows until it become intolerable and explosive. Perhaps hope can only come from suicides' (2009, p. 55). It is important to distinguish this strategy from deceleration, for if the former represents a weary retreat, the later represents a purposeful

withdrawal. The difference is subtle but critical. Arguably, the recombinant function is a form of suicide, for by killing off his worker-identity, the employee-cum-saboteur invites an indeterminate future of collective becomings. Although the valorization of work and the cultivation of worker-identity has been the lifeblood of the twentieth-century unions, it may soon be possible to speak of a labor movement without workers. But this desubjectivation can never be a pure negativity, a mere *not*-subject, for it is accompanied by an unpredictable and always contingent subjectivation (even if only becoming-autonomous). This resurgent subjectivation is asymptotic, never settling into a new subject-identity, but constantly remaking itself through continual experimentation.

However, under late capitalism it is no longer possible to propose a mode of resistance that exists outside of capital. One of the dominant features of control society is its resiliency. If disciplinary society was able to contain dissent by forcing it to the margins, control society embraces and consumes its opposition. For Lazzarato, in olden days, the goal was confinement of the outside and the disciplining of whatever subjectivities now they can be seized only through modulation. Even the politics of anti-identity, which at one point seemed deeply threatening, have been wrapped in plastic and sold in the supermarket, to borrow liberally from Hardt and Negri. The paradox here is that as capitalism constantly reinvents itself to include whatever subjectivities, exploitation only becomes more intense. Or as Deleuze writes (here with Guattari), '… capitalism is always capable of adding to its axiomatic in terms of an enlargement of its limits: let's create the New Deal; let's cultivate and recognize strong unions; let's promote participation, the single class; let's take a step toward Russia …' (2004, p. 137). The limits of capitalist innovation are bounded only by the pretensions of labor.

Dé(class)é Struggle

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the history of unions' relationship to precarity. If unions today are overwhelmingly against precarity, workers' movements have historically had a deeply ambivalent relationship with precarity. As Bifo recalls, 'one of the strong ideas of the movement of autonomous proletarians during the 1970s was the idea "precariousness is good". Job precariousness is a form of autonomy from steady regular work, lasting an entire life' (2009, p. 77). Autonomists regarded 'secure' employment as something of a death sentence, preferring short-term work with no contractual obligations. But this was possible only during a moment of extreme historical specificity characterized by near full employment and expansive social protections. Today, with unemployment much higher and social protections everywhere undermined, precarity has a much more ominous tone. But if the movements of the 1960s and 1970s demanded autonomy, the refusal of work,

sabotage and dissent, precarity was capital's perverse response. 'Workers demanded freedom from the life-time prison of the industrial factory. Deregulation responded with the flexibilization and the fractalization of labor' (Bifo, 2009, p. 76). As Deleuze warned, under control society, capital reacts to demands not through exclusion, but through an inclusion that is all the more insidious.

But not all is lost. While capital has a unique capacity to co-opt out of consume insurgencies, it also constantly generates new sites of struggle. The increasing connectivity of the modern economy generates new potentialities for resistance. For example, just-in-time production, which allows escape from the traditional problem of overproduction by pushing goods down the supply chain on an as-needed basis, has created nodes of power at distribution centers. Even as the Castellsians celebrate the flattening of social space, these distribution centers exhibit a particular vulnerability since their disruption would adversely impact all downstream nodes. Likewise, the 'logistical' sectors – roughly, those industries that transport goods, people and information – have only grown in importance.

Still, unions have largely proven incapable of taking advantage of these opportunities. Their deficiencies are both strategic and structural. Unions today take the form of bloated bureaucracies, only slightly different in form from the businesses they claim to oppose. As arbiters of the employment relation, their social role is to negotiate the terms under which they will sell their members' labor power to potential employers. Writing on the adaptation of worker assemblages to capitalist restructuring, Bifo counterposes the *conjunction* to the *connection*: 'Conjunction is the meeting and fusion of round and irregular shapes that are continuously weaseling their way about with no precision, repetition or perfection. Connection is the punctual and repeatable interaction of algorithmic functions, straight lines and points that overlap perfectly, and plug in or out according to discrete modes of interaction that render the different parts compatible to a pre-established standard' (2009, p. 99). Of course, Bifo is referring to the requirements of capital, but he might as easily be writing about the expectations of the labor movement. Trade unions allow little space for round bodies, they flatten variation and render social space smooth. Unions demand that their members subordinate disparate subjectivities to a master subjectivity – that of the worker. (The existence of officially sanctioned 'constituent groups' in the AFL-CIO such as Pride at Work, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women only underscores this point; many of these groups began as oppositional caucuses that were later co-opted.)

Yet there are some exceptions. Labor is not a monolithic bloc. It might more accurately be described as a 'movement of movements', to borrow a term from the anti-globalization movement. While the official labor movement tends to speak in a monotone, it has a rich tradition of both inter-union competition and

intra-union resistance. In the years since the 'Postscript' was penned, France has seen the explosive growth of the new militant union alliance 'Solidarité, Unité, Democratie' (SUD) which refuses to offer its allegiance to the five 'major' federations and political parties. The SUD was one of the major forces behind the October 2010 general strike against pension reforms, and among the last holdouts when the strike was eventually called off. In the United States until the 1980s, rank-and-file members formed powerful oppositional caucuses that proved capable of holding their leaders' feet to the fire. However, union dissidents typically remain within the confines of disciplinary society, and stop well short the type of aggressive re-imagining Deleuze seems to recommend.

Precarization will force a reinvention not only of unionism but of traditional theories of social class. If critical race theory, post-second wave feminism and queer theory have partially succeeded in destabilizing and dismantling categories of race, gender and sexuality, respectively, most scholars persist in maintaining the relative fixity of class categories. The twin projects of 'queering race' and 'queering gender' are beginning to make inroads into the academic mainstream, but class remains decidedly 'un-queered', even at the margins of the academy. (There has been some writing at the intersection of class and sexuality, but this is a somewhat different project than the one that I am suggesting.) As Mauricio Lazzarato has written, 'classes do not manage to contain multiplicity, in the same way that heterosexuality no longer normalizes the thousand sexes' (2006, p. 177). Toni Negri's 'social worker' formulation represents a bold move away from traditional class categories, but most theorists of class fail to make that move, to put it mildly. For Bifo, 'Social class is not to seen as an ontological concept, but rather as a vectorial concept' (2009, p. 74). Rather than posing classes as fixed categories, or even the Lukascian formulation class-in-itself/class-for-itself, we might think of becoming-class.

Yet Lazzarato believes *becoming* is absolutely incompatible with the institutions of disciplinary society: 'institutions, which are either those of power or those of the labor movement, do not know becoming' (2006, p. 180). In contrast, the labor movement of the future must aspire to a pure becoming, in the temporality of the event. While institutions know only inertia and homogeneity, pure becoming follows an evasive line of flight that eludes capture by the present and exudes difference. This may require style of *organizing* that does not have as its goal the creation or maintenance of an (properly sociological) *organization*, that is, a stable entity with a fixed membership. This is not to necessarily suggest that the labor movement should strive toward absolute spontaneity or the rejection of organization *as such*, but that it must meticulously avoid the calcified stagnancy that inevitably accompanies the drive toward institutional permanance.

In other ways, the traditional labor movement is inadequate to the current historical moment. As Hardt and Negri write, 'the old trade unions are not able

to represent the unemployed, the poor, or even the mobile and flexible post-Fordist workers with short-term contracts, all of whom participate actively in social production and increase social wealth … Second, the old unions are divided according to the various products and tasks defined in the heyday of industrial production' (2004, p. 136). If the traditional labor movement was invested in techniques of confinement, segmentation, regimentation and exclusion, the incipient 'dangerous classes' (Hardt and Negri's term) know only the opposite – variation, intermingling, and above all, constant motion. On the one hand, the isolation of info-labor seems to preclude any collective action, as traditionally conceived. On the other, technological interdependence creates lines of intersection that far exceed the Taylorized factory worker. As Hardt and Negri write, 'at each intersection of lines of creativity or lines of flight the social subjectivities become more hybrid, mixed and misceginated, further escaping the fusional powers of control' (2004, p. 136). While the info-laborer is physically isolated, his virtual community of resistance is unbounded by the walls of the workplace and therefore potentially limitless.

Here the figure of the nomad takes on a new meaning. Hardt and Negri made explicit their Deleuzian influence (and incurred no shortage of wrath from orthodox Marxists) by presenting the 'nomadic revolutionary' as the new subject of history. As inspiration, they turn to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which was the first to organize nomadic workers (lumberjacks in the American Pacific Northwest and migrant farmworkers in the Southwest), and whose organizers were often transient themselves. Moreover, the IWW in its early history had quasi-autonomous chapters that identified with the spirit of the group but had little or no contact with the central leadership or the organization proper. A labor movement in a society of control will be nomadic in two senses of the word: it will not be place-bound, given that work is no longer confined to determinate locations, but neither can it be ideologically bound to the Nation or to the Party. Some unions have recently begun to experiment (very tentatively) with *trans*national alliances, but the labor movement of the future will go much further – it will be resolutely *anti*-nationalist. That is, it will be anti-parliamentarian, impervious to the political process, and unwilling to submit to the logic of the State.

Workers, for their part, may be willing to build new forms, including abandoning and actively opposing existing unions as necessary. After all, France in 1968 was a rebellion against the PCF (French Communist Party) and the CGT (General Confederation of Labor, the largest trade union federation in France) as much as against the DeGaullist state. If unions have tended to regard movements of the unemployed and the marginally employed as adjunct or secondary to their central objectives, these movements will soon take center stage. If the whole of human existence has been folded into labor, a strike can only take the form of complete withdrawal of one's active and complicit

participation in the bio-political and neo-political spheres. (Some in France have called for replacing the 'general strike' with the 'total human strike'.) The labor movement of the future will not organize workers exclusively or even primarily in their capacity as workers. Hardt and Negri trace the lineage of work through progressively larger social spheres, from the specialized professional worker to the unskilled mass worker and finally to the social worker, whose total activity has become productive. Today, there is no 'outside' to work, as all human activity, except non-voluntary functions are rendered productive. Any movement of social workers will organize through the entire cycle of social labor.

Moreover, the labor movement of the future will have a deeply ambivalent relationship with the contract. The labor movement is deeply wedded to contractualism as its primary organizing tool, even as corporations and governments have reneged on their end of the bargain. Three large US states (New York, Illinois and California) and two out of the three major US auto companies demanded that unions 're-open' their contracts in the recent recession. Yet contracts, with their requisite no-strike clauses, remain the norm in the public and private sectors.

Struggle Beneath the Plane of Intelligibility

In an interview conducted independently from his sometime collaborator Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari seems to respond to the question that opens this essay. While answering a question about his analytical technique, Guattari claims, 'in certain periods, institutions of the labor movement have produced new subjectivities, and, to force the issue, I would even say different "human races" … A certain type of worker of the Paris Commune became so "mutant" that there was no choice but for bourgeoisie to exterminate this type. They are perceived as a diabolical menace, as insupportable' (1996, p. 124). While nobody yearns for the fate of the Paris Commune, it represented a sharp break from the guilds and fraternal societies that had dominated the fledgling workers movement up to that point. One hundred and fifty years later, it may be time for another mutation on this scale.

What (non)-forms will these mutant workers take? In the United States, the IWW has an active organizing drive at Jimmy Johns, a medium-sized US fast food sandwich chain, with about 1000 retail outlets in the American midwest. Fast food workers are the iconic exemplars of the precarious economy, and the IWW's campaign to organize these workers was the first of its kind in the United States. Members designed a logo for their campaign featuring anthromorphized cats making sandwiches, referencing a coded symbol (the black cat represents sabotage). While officially the IWW no longer endorses sabotage, the black cat remains an important figure in their symbolic vocabulary. But this image stands in marked contrast to the difference-effacing collectivism of traditional unions.

The cats' round, furry bodies form a conjunction, not a connection, they retain disparate subjectivities, and significantly, they are not even human.

Emergent non-union formations like worker centers have generated considerable interest among the self-appointed intellectuals of the working class. But even if they break with the mainstream labor movement in a formal sense, they often cling to familiar tropes of family, community, identity and state-centered 'rights discourse'. Rarely do they differ significantly from conventional unions in terms of their structure, tactics, rhetoric, encoding, analytical frame and styles of self-presentation.

Some of the more interesting struggles are those that have attracted comparatively less attention. In New York City, a group of contract workers at MTV staged a series of rolling strikes in 2007 to protest the lack of employer-paid healthcare coverage. Through the job action coincided with a strike by the Writers Guild of America, some of whom were also employed by MTV's corporate parent Viacom, the freelancers themselves had no union representation at all (Stetler, 2007). In China, where non-state-sanctioned union activity is illegal, and virtually all independent political formations are officially banned, scholars estimate there are about 50 000 work disruptions per annum, almost entirely beyond the purview of any formal organization. Self-employed Internet workers have organized virtual job actions via the open-source and antisec movements. These emergent struggles will likely be tentative, and they not be immediately perceptible, particularly to those observers steeped in the convalescent logic of twentieth-century unionism. While these movements will face immediate pressure to reorganize along traditional lines and re-present themselves in ways that mimic old forms, their opacity may be their greatest virtue. These formations may not immediately be recognized as political speech-acts, and they may not even seek to be recognized as such. Already, there have been efforts to map these struggles onto known coordinates. But despite the challenge of *Autonomia*, the expressive vocabulary of the labor movement (the work stoppage, the contract, the workday) survives only as an afterimage of a distant memory. Even the hourly wage itself, as both measure of exploitation and object of collective bargaining, is being reconfigured as technological and affective labor increasingly reverts to a piece-rate system. Eventually, the emergent movements may produce a new semiotic system of meaning that exceeds the limits of language or even surpasses the political speech-act itself.

And what of the possibility of adaptation? In Negri and Guattari's co-authored essay 'Communist Propositions', they leave no doubt as to their position: 'Let a thousand machines of life, art and solidarity sweep away the stupid and sclerotic arrogance of old organizations!' (1996, p. 250). Under a regime that already prizes continuous retraining, innovation and adaptation, only a monstrous movement of recombinant mutants is capable of disruption.

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