

TODAY



Anna Galkina, *Rats!*, collage, 2011 - Courtesy of the artist

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TOWARD THE EUROPEAN INSURRECTION

Europe will be the product of your mind

Spring 2011 : the European Union is on the brink of the catastrophe, as Neoliberal dogmatism is imposing the diktat of the financial class upon the interests of society. Let's look back, before we try to understand what has to be done.

In the year 1933 in his *Discours à la nation européenne*, Julien Benda wrote the following words :

Vous ferez l'Europe par ce que vous direz, non par ce que vous serez. L'Europe sera un produit de votre esprit, de la volonté de votre esprit, non un produit de votre être. Et si vous me répondez que vous ne croyez pas à l'autonomie de l'esprit, que votre esprit ne peut être autre chose qu'un aspect de votre être, alors je vous déclare que vous ne ferez jamais l'Europe. Car il n'y a pas d'Être européen.

Benda says that there is no European identity. No ethnic identity, no religious identity, no national identity. This is the strength and the beauty of the European project. Europe can only be the product of our mind.

I would say also: a product of our imagination. And the problem of Europe nowadays is exactly here : the European leading class, and also the European intelligentsia, if something like this still exists, has lost any vision, any imagination of the future, and is only able to reassess the old failed dogmas of capitalist accumulation and of mandatory economic growth and financial profit. This is clearly leading European society to the catastrophe.

What has been Europe in the past century ? As Benda predicted, it has been the product of a vision.

In 1945 Europe was the vision of a political construction overcoming the philosophical opposition of Enlightenment and Romanticism, the opposition of Universal Reason and cultural identity. It was the vision and the dream of a world of peace, the dream of a post-national process. This was the strength and the attraction of the European idea.

Then, in the '70s and in the '80 Europe was the project of overcoming the opposition between East and West, between socialism and democratic values. It was also the expectation of prosperity for everybody. The upheaval of 1989 and the following unification was the fulfillment of this European dream.

Prosperity has been the common ground of identification for old and new European citizens. But when the decline of the Western dominance on the world economy started to jeopardize European prosperity, what happened of the European political expectations ?

Europe, once viewed as a symbol of hope and an object of desire, suddenly has turned a symbol of economic oppression and the harbinger of impoverishment.

In an article published by the New York Times in 2010 when the European crisis started to be perceived in all its seriousness, Roger Cohen wrote some far sighted words. What is more frightening in the current European situation, he said, is not the danger of a financial collapse, but the absence of a vision in the words of the European leaders. What they are only able to repeat is that the Maastricht criteria have to be honoured, and the debts have to be paid and the banks have to be protected, at the expenses of salaries and pensions and public education.

Vision or governance

Where is creative thought in nowadays European space ? Where the thinkers, the poets, the creators who may produce the vision and the imagination that according to Julien Benda is the vital prerequisite of Europe ?

European thinkers are an extinct species. Conformity and dogmatism are the prevailing features of the public discourse. In the '70s French philosophy was able to prefigure the evolution of Neoliberal capitalism and the establishment of biopolitical control on social life. But the last generation, the generation of former Stalino-maoist turned apologists of market democracy, is incapable of creative thought. It's a generation of journalists at best, of repentants and cynicist at worst – not philosophers, not thinkers, not creators.

Europe needs thought, not subservient dogmatism. But creative thought seems something of the past.

Jurgen Habermas has been able some years ago to give a contribution which was based on the generous idea that communication is a space of open dialogue and a force for democracy. But the Italian experience of the last three decades has abundantly proved the contrary.

Niklas Luhmann has been able to conceptualize the present form of the European reality, as he has revealed in a realistic way that democratic government has been replaced by technocracy and governance., What is the meaning of this world, that is often used as an exoteric keyword, cherished and emphasized, but not explained ? I would define governance as power based on information without meaning.

Governance is the keyword of the European construction.
Pure functionality without conscious intentionality. Automation of thought and will.
Embedding of abstract connections in the relation between living organisms.
Technical subjection of choices to the logic concatenation.

Europe is a perfectly postmodern construction in which power is embodied by technolinguistic devices of interconnection and interoperationality.

The European entity has been conceived since its beginning as possibility of overcoming passions: nationalist, ideological, cultural passion, dangerous marks of belonging. This has

been the positive contribution of Europe to the evolution of political history, but in this empty space of identity has been filled by the absolutism of the Economic Dogma.

Governance is the replacement of democracy and political will with a system of automatic technicalities forcing reality into an unquestionable logic-framework. Financial stability, competition, labor cost reduction, increase of productivity: the systemic architecture of the E.U. rule is based on these dogmatic foundations that cannot be challenged or discussed, because they are embedded in the functioning of technical sub-systems of management. No enunciation or action is operational if it is not complying with the embedded rules of techno-linguistic dispositifs of daily exchange.

So far nobody has questioned this dogmatic construction and the ideology of governance, as prosperity was replacing democracy. But now the situation seems dangerously inclining towards the breakdown, and if Europe falls down the doors of violence and of national populism are wide open.

As Europe is not a democracy, and the decisions are never taken by a democratically elected organism, what can happen in the coming months and years ? European Parliament is just a symbolic place, that has no influence on the Central Bank, which is the real decider (better, the mere interpreter of monetarist rules that are embedded in the financial governance machine). Therefore the only way to stop the race towards the abyss is insurrection. Only European insurrection can dispel the fogs and miasmas of recession, violence, impoverishment, and fascism, and open a new story, which is within our reach.

The new story is based on unleashing the potency of the general intellect, the potencies of research, technical innovation, scientific creation. Basic income, redistribution of wealth, expropriation of the properties hoarded by financial corporations.

At this point I think that we should redress a certain idealism and voluntarism that may be detected in the Julian Benda's words, when he says that Europe will only be the product of the mind. Now we know that mind is not something that belongs to the isolated individual, something that acts in a purely abstract space. Mind is the network of cognitive labor: general intellect, core of social production.

Intellectual labor is under aggression, and financial capitalism is trying to disactivate the force of millions and millions of cognitarians who are the true resource of Europe. European people are marching towards the insurrection. Only who is obscured by dogmatism is unable to see this. What has happened in London and Rome in december 2010, what has happened in Spain in May 2011, what is happening every day in Athens is only the beginning of an expanding wave, that will necessarily radicalize.

Our task is not to organize insurrection. Insurrection is in the things.

Our task is to arouse the consciousness of precarious cognitarians, to organize their political collaboration, to make possible the autonomy of their activity outside the market rules. For this we need to mobilise resources: money, spaces, technical tools.

Insurrection is the process that will give to the precarious cognitariat what we need.

STEPS TO A MYSTIQUE OF THE ECONOMY

Disclaimer: God

There are several ways of understanding an object or a phenomenon. We can talk about its essence, its form, its origin... We can also understand it according to its way of being productive. I would like to use this latter point of view. The question, then, is no longer 'what is it?', 'what does it look like?', 'where does it come from?', but rather 'what does it produce?', 'how is it definable according to its production?'.

Admittedly, the object we will talk about is not of the easiest type to handle, not even with the best precautions. It is not easy, but it is fundamental. Rather, it is splendid and necessary. After all, beautiful things are difficult.

What do we talk about, when we talk about God? To say it in one word, according to the point of view previously stated, we talk about His glory. 'The glory of Him who moveth everything / Doth penetrate the universe, and shine.' The glory of God, His power (*puissance*), expands and irradiates like light through any substance that shares its same universe. Just like light, His glory is the measure of His productive force, of His ability to produce results: to make blossom, to burn, to make grow, to make a desert. Can we, then, talk about God every time we encounter an object which is able to irradiate light? In a sense, yes, but we can't really give the denomination of 'God' to any tiny little light trembling in the night.

We must be clear, now: when we talk about God – when I talk about God – I do so with the tongue and the eyes of an atheist. A benevolent atheist. With almost fideistic certainty, I place God in a position that follows that of humans along the chronological segment of History. As He was produced by humans (for reasons that we won't explore now), God cannot exist without them. And yet, as I was saying, mine is a benevolent gaze. Better, it is passionate. Love as well, just like God, neither preexists humans, nor can exist aside from them. Yet, we cannot deny its devastating power, its extraordinary productivity. But there is a difference between love and God, a difference that is not to be calculated in terms of the intensity of their flame, but rather of the extension of their light. If love is a streetlamp, shining at road crossings, God is a sun that lights up the whole universe. God is a phenomenon that affects communities in their entirety. That is, He is a social phenomenon.

We could dare to define God as the main star that, through His glory, lights an entire society, producing His effects at a fundamental level of social life. Like the rays of the sun structure the color and the spines of plants, which in turn transform themselves in order to please Him, God functions within human communities as the horizon of reference according to which a society shapes its structures, dynamics, and scales of judgement.

Such a God, of course, is far from being immortal. Like in an accelerated galaxy, the stars that succeed each other in the role of God change continuously and take each other's place according to the portions of History and of the world on which they shine. Many

different Gods have crossed the sky of the West over the last two thousand years. The God of imperial law, that of theocracy, that of war, that of reason, that of the State... Let us lift our gaze to the sky and let us observe the face of the sun currently shining above our heads. We have long learnt His present name, and His power has been continuously expanding over the years, to the point of encompassing almost the totality of the globe that produced Him. He is a elderly-ish sun, now, almost two hundred years old. His name, as it is often the case, preexisted His Kingdom. We used to call Him oikonomia, when He was still in His youth. Now, in the glorious time of His zenith, we call Him Economy.

History of the Churches

Like any God, Economy has His own church or, rather, His own churches. And it is known that churches, when institutionalized, are permanently warring armies.

The main religious war ended just twenty years ago, when the crusaders of Western Capitalism exterminated the infidels of Soviet Marxism. Blood flowed like rivers, victory was tremendous, and the jubilee that followed lasted for a long time. During the 1990s, the holy trinity of GDP, Growth-Liquidity-Credit, casted its benevolent gaze over the chosen peoples of the West. Libations wetted the sweaty foreheads and prozac burnt on the altars. But minor divinities can be capricious. The great temple of Wall Street collapsed, as if under the assault of legions of demons. War erupted again. It was a civil war.

The front of the Church split and, while the orthodox put themselves in the hands of their most bellicose fringe, the Neoliberists, the Protestant wing gathered in arms around new icons. Protestants had threadbare clothes, preached sacrifices and moderation. Degrowth! they were shouting in university rooms. Sustainability! they were screaming in conferences. Enough with easy credit! they were telling each other. Protestants weren't many, but their icy words were quickly winning over the most pavid hearts. Holy Mother Church closed itself inside a perennial council. No longer Trent, but Genoa, Cancun, London, Doha... Sometimes the council was limited to the Great 8 guardians of the Church, sometimes to the Great 20, sometimes opened itself to a plenary assembly of guardians, academic clerics, financial inquisitors, international guards. Activity was frantic, while official edicts started ordering terror and optimism in the same measure. But the capricious gods struck again.

Growth, Liquidity, and Credit frowned their olympic brows and turned their blessings over their chosen peoples into lighting of crisis and tempest. Recession hit the West like a billion locusts, devouring anything it found in its path. At the same time, on the horizon started to appear the sails of the caravels of the new conquerors: Chinese, Brazilians, Russians, Indians, and Turks set their flags on top of their masts and shone their swords in preparation for landing. Like the Aztec priests before them, the clerics of Holy Mother Church saw the apocalypse stretching its black wings and decided that only sacrifices could have appeased the fury of God and of His flight of vassal divinities. Austerity spread in torrents all over the altars, as the chests of thousands unemployed, elderly, disabled, youth, and migrants were cut open by the sacred knife. But it wasn't enough. God's thirst could not be slaked. Despite their number, the sacrificial victims didn't have enough blood to offer. And they even started to rebel, forcing the priests to tighten the ropes with which they were dragging them to the altar.

From their strongholds, Protestants chanted with the joy of the latter day. We told you! The end is near! Repent! Protestant priests wore their best robes and invaded newspaper offices, TV studios, radio stations. They took their icons out of the shrines and showed them to the public. Adore the true pictures of the gods! they ordered, as they presented their plans for recovery. Your theory, your paradigms, your models are wrong, they are blasphemous! they told the Neoliberal bishops. Seated around large tables, wearing their pointiest hats, orthodox and heterodox priests challenged each other over endless discussions on the true faith. As the walls of Byzantium started to crumble under the attacks of invisible Jannissaries, the clerics raised and raised their voices, their chants became ever more complex, their robes swirled faster and faster as they danced around with desperate vigour. All around them, the population held its breath, looked up at the sky in fear, and waited with trembling resignation for the seventh seal to break, for the seven trumpets to sing their deadly melodies.

Call¹

Listen! That end that you see approaching will not be the end for you. The kingdom that you see crumbling is not your kingdom. The flags that you see burning are not your flags. Hold your tears, stop your trembling! The coming apocalypse will descend on your hair like the tender caress of God. The day has come when God will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Look at them burn, those horned priests, the goats that for centuries have been sinking their hoofs into your flesh – even worse, that for millennia have hidden the light of God with their deformed figures. The glory of Him who moveth everything doth penetrate the universe, and shine in one part more and in another less. It shines less in the shadow of your priests, sacks of worms bound together by silk ties and stacks of banknotes. Look at them, the priests, as they contort themselves in the fire of their own arrogance. They dared to think in your place, they dared to shit on your heads and twist the word of God. They claimed that God would have never talked to you in the depth of your heart, that you would never be able to access His mysteries without their mediation, without their intercession. Blasphemous mobsters! Maybe *their* God doesn't talk? I will never pray to a dumb God, but I would rather open my heart to one who speaks. You were an ekklesia, my poor people, a permanent assembly of benevolent, clever creatures, naturally disposed to bring the voice of God into your hands like a handful of fruitful wheat. The priests descended on you like ravens, they wounded your fingers with their poisonous beaks and forced you on your knees. Rise up! The great are great only because you are on your knees! The ekklesia in which you used to find solace was born a virgin, plentiful of every wealth. The world was yours, because you had created a God that would create it for you only. But since you forgot to elect your ministers, your first servants, the priests with their lewdness have turned it into a whore. The deadly flight of the authorities was sent by God onto your fields to punish you for your sloth. But from the moment you will straighten your backs and you will clench one hand into a fist and you will lend the other to each other, you won't have to obey the rapacious laws of the ravens any

¹ The reader might find in this last paragraph hidden, literal quotes from Thomas Muntzer, Moses, Kirkegaard, Dante, Proudhon, Saint Matthew, Saint Paul, the sixth patriarch of the C'han school, Vernard Eller and others.

longer, and once again you will be able to organize yourselves in assemblies. The time of harvest is nigh! *Omins potestas a Deo per populum!* It is for freedom that you have been redeemed! What is to be done? How to do it? I desire from you only that which your diligence should demand: you should close your ears to the tongues of the priests and open them to the living word of God, flowing out of God's mouth. And the priests will tell you: close your hearts, drown them in the litres of ink of the Scriptures, study the holy books until you have turned blind, before daring to challenge our authority. Ravens! They circle over you as if over open graves, with their eye-hungry beaks. Do not listen to them! Throw back at them the diarrhea of financial mathematics that they are pouring over you. Raise your bows and take down the harpies. The priests, the scribes, raise their books toward the sky to hide the sunlight. And you will raise your torches and will set them on fire! Bring down your axes on their greedy hands and smash the books they are brandishing with precise blows. Do not let your blades get cold, blow until they turn into swords of fire! God is not far from you. His word is in your heart. Talk to Him face to face, as a friend talks to a friend. Do not waste time explaining to the priests what you are doing. The person who has never found in himself the word of God, who has not lived it in his flesh, does not know how to say anything essential about God, even though he may have devoured a hundred thousand books. Accept God into your hands as a weapon, as a tool, as a toy. After having created Him, the seventh day you let Him rest, and now He's curled up on your lap like a sleeping cat. Wake Him up! Let his claws mark your lives along the lines that you will desire to invent. Everything is permitted! But not everything is useful. Look into the spiderwebs of your dreams and of your needs and find which paths you want to walk, which ones you want to cross with the directions of your ekklesia, which ones you want to let be covered by weeds and thorns. But do not forget, properties are different from tools. Keep the latter for yourselves and share the former among you, according to everyone's needs. *Omnia sunt communia!* Nothing else can and will limit the joy of your creation, the rain of your desires! Because you are the unconditioned, and in you is the truth. Because in you is the power, in you is the wood that gives birth to the flame. Everything is in you, and nothing is in the sky. Let the stars to be the ones that lean over to look at you, and to remain enchanted.

PROPOSAL FOR A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN ADVANCE OF THE DISINTEGRATION OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION

"30/40 years ago we were still debating about what the future would be; Communist, Fascist, Capitalist, whatever... Today nobody even debates these issues, we all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand we are obsessed with cosmic catastrophes; the whole of life on earth disintegrating because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the earth and so on...

So the paradox is that it is much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism"²

The Impending Trial

As we approach what may be the end of the current chapter of late capitalism, dramatic environmental change has begun to take centre stage: A realization that the contemporary western model of production and consumption is unsustainable has led to a plethora of official reports from various national, multinational and international bodies outlining the current crisis;

There is compelling evidence that the rising levels of greenhouse gases will have a warming effect on the climate through increasing the amount of infrared radiation (heat energy) trapped by the atmosphere: "the greenhouse effect". In total, the warming effect due to all (Kyoto) greenhouse gases emitted by human activities is now equivalent to around 430 ppm of carbon dioxide (hereafter, CO₂ equivalent or CO₂e) and rising at around 2.3 ppm per year. Current levels of greenhouse gases are higher now than at any time in at least the past 650,000 years.³

The ramifications of these reports and their suggestions are far reaching, and seem to present a unique opportunity for those working in and around architecture to embrace a new ethos.

Projects have already been initiated in which architects are 'employing sustainable design and resource conservation to achieve a reduction from the current level of fossil fuels used to construct and operate new and renovated buildings'⁴ These low emission housing developments, utilizing alternative methods of power generation and waste management are the most immediate reaction to a global problem, seeking to halt climate change at its source, yet it is merely one facet of the architectural response. Looking to the future many architects are working to 'help design living and working spaces for a warming world...to

² Slavoj Zizek - University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

³ Stern Review, HM Treasury, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007

⁴ Architects and Climate Change, AIA, <http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/architectsandclimatechange.pdf>

produce work that not only helps us mitigate climate change, but helps us adapt to the climate changes we're already locked into.⁵

For architecture this task must be considered quotidian; a discipline which has excelled in rebuilding post-war Europe and must address the material destruction of civil war and international terrorism is certainly malleable to this new challenge. Yet in truth, it is debateable whether the behemoth that is global capitalism can perform an elegant u-turn in such a short period of time; while the Stern Review focused comprehensively on the economic viability of any challenge to climate change it is questionable if the international community will be willing to relinquish the 1% of global GDP needed to achieve it.⁶

Nevertheless the ability to meet these targets may be of little consequence, as with each report the diagnoses appears graver still. A report to be published in April 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will suggest the 'most optimistic scenario would see a likely increase in temperature of 2.4C over pre-industrial levels by 2100.'⁷ The EU has defined any rise over 2C as "dangerous" and it is debateable how long it will be before a report officially recognizes any efforts as too late.

Seemingly the network of global capital, that under economists such as John Maynard Keynes was able to resuscitate the post-war world, will ultimately be our undoing, leaving us instead with Keynes' most quoted line; 'In the long run, we are all dead'.⁸

A Radical Proposal

In consequence it would follow that any uncompromising practice must take an aberrant tack, that the architects' perspective must shift fundamentally to understand the true issues. This is Post-Modernism at its most literal, the modern world is fast reaching its inevitable conclusion and in its wake nothing new can be created. The enquiry must not be how can we build but how can we disassemble to hasten the recovery of a planet, post-human civilization.

*'For many thousands of years there would still be some signs of the civilisations that we created... It might be severely crumbling in many places, but it'll take a long time to become invisible.'*⁹

Not only will these empty monuments stand valueless they will fundamentally hinder future evolution, consequently their destruction is by no means defeatist rather it is essential in

⁵ International Dialogues: Architecture and Climate Change, Townsend, Solitaire, http://www.riba.org/go/RIBA/News/Press_5917.html

⁶ Stern Review - Executive Summary, http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/999/76/CLOSED_SHORT_executive_summar...

⁷ David, Adam, Worse Than We Thought, The Guardian (London), 3/2/2007

⁸ Keynes, John Maynard, A Tract on Monetary Reform, Macmillan & Co., Ltd, London 1923

⁹ Holmes, Bob, Imagine Earth Without People, New Scientist (London), Issue 2573, 12/8/2006

securing a true legacy that will outlast our infinitesimal existence.

While the dismantling of the structures of the modern world is no small feat, architectural practice has always been intrinsically linked with the overcoming of nature and the elements: By merely inverting this knowledge we can begin to shape a solution to the problem.

The hardness of modern structures to weathering will certainly prolong their existence, but the local ecosystem could be mobilized in a much simpler and literal fashion. The evidence is already available that flora quickly reclaims what man has discarded, in abandoned cities such as Pripyat near Chernobyl 'the most pervasive thing you see are plants whose root systems get into the concrete and behind the bricks and into doorframes and so forth, and are rapidly breaking up the structure.'¹⁰ The challenge therefore is to create an environment in which this process is not only commenced but actively encouraged to ensure the process is as swift as possible.

A Comprehensive Strategy

The Proposal then is to mould an architectural landscape in which flora is positioned strategically, upon the dissolution of human civilization, to subsume the man made edifice left behind. Plants would, in the course of their natural growth, promptly destroy the structural integrity of the buildings, collapsing them far more rapidly than if left unchecked.

Plans to this effect could be executed with relative ease, plants such as ivy are already used as a decorative adornment but if not treated with vigilance, 'can dig into mortar and pull off rendering'¹¹ Climbing plants such as these can be utilized as their tendrils and feathered rootlets probe the niches of a structure, scaling but inadvertently rending the architectural fabric. The roots of trees perform much the same function in a subterranean manner, but are less suited to the task as young saplings are far less robust in an urban environment. The employment of trees and shrubs would perhaps form part of a later, long term phase, helping to brake up foundations and rubble of the demolished buildings. This though would be a spontaneous consequence of natural seed distribution and so would need no preliminary human planning.

Given the relatively small amount of ground space needed in ratio to destructive potential, climbing plants would be ideal for these ends, yet the choice of an ideal candidate is dependant on a variety of criteria. Most notably the climatic considerations coupled with the growth rate and the robustness of the plant would be the essential concerns, other more structure-specific concerns would no doubt arise, but would be best dealt with within the planning of individual projects. This proposal will deal with climate of a Temperate Latitude, as this covers the majority of the western world, and so selections will be made on this assumption.

Two species of climbing plants of the Genus *Fallopia* present themselves as ideal, both for

¹⁰ Holmes, Bob, Imagine Earth Without People, New Scientist (London), Issue 2573, 12/8/2006

¹¹ Cannell, Felicity, Invasion of the Climbing Plants, The Independent (London), 12/5/1998

their existing utilization, and their potential for symbiotic cooperation. *Fallopia baldschuanica* and *Fallopia japonica* are extremely hardy climbers with the potential for a growth rate exceeding 20ft a year.

Fallopia baldschuanica or Russian Vine is the faster growing of the two, quickly enveloping host structures, it can develop 3ft fronds in one to two weeks and the strength of these growths is enough to break through even the most resilient building materials. Despite this, the Russian Vine is not especially enduring in the face of potential damage from the process of deconstruction. Should the vine be damaged or buried by debris from the target structure it may prove fatal as its resources are stored in its woody shoots, which can be easily damaged or disconnected from the roots of the plant.

Fallopia japonica or Japanese Knotweed on the other hand does not grow with the strength or vigour of its cousin but is less susceptible to damage as it stores its resources in stout underground rhizomes. This enables the plant to recover quickly, re-growing from the smallest possible fragment, if a substantial part of the body is destroyed. These rhizomes also allow the young shoots to push upwards with a remarkable strength, easily breaking through asphalt and similar urban building materials. Thus potentially disrupting the foundations of the architecture and clearing space for trees and shrubs to take root.

The final advantage of a combination of the Russian Vine and Japanese Knotweed is the potential for cross pollination, producing the hybrid *Fallopia x conollyana*. This is advantageous firstly as a third species reduces the risk of all the floras being destroyed by pest or disease, but also as it grows with the strength, if not the speed, of *F. baldschuanica* yet from the rhizomes of *F. japonica*

For optimum height both species will profit from initial planting within large irrigated containers located around the base of buildings. Ideally the plants would benefit from being planted in both these irrigated containers and in surrounding earth, so as to take advantage of naturally drained, nutrient rich soil, and also to begin the break up of foundations and surface coverings. Yet if this is not possible, the irrigated containers should be made from a material that the roots of the plant can fracture upon reaching a certain volume, therefore spreading the soil upon the surface covering (most likely concrete or asphalt) which the strong, mature roots can proceed to breach and shatter from the top down.

In external structural areas that shelter or enclose space and hence render large scale planting unfeasible plants should be introduced into the fabric of the building itself. Where possible niches or areas of damage should be exploited as possible placement locations, not only to provide cover for the young plant but because these areas of minor damage can often present opportunities to undermine the entire structural integrity of the building. This secondary placement is especially pertinent within concrete or other solid cast structures, as it is not possible for the plants to exploit the relatively brittle mortar, as is the case with brick buildings.

After planting, within a period of roughly 2 years an entire building should be enclosed within the plants, it is likely that the plants will have begun to exploit weaknesses in the structure and disrepair arising from neglect; some moderate structural damage may occur. After this period of time the plants will have most likely have shattered their containers and the more mature plants will have begun to break apart any surface covering.

The majority of the significant demolition would take place over the next 5 to 10 years as the plants begin to constrict and burst the structure and undermine the foundations. It is likely that the demolition will be hastened through the collapse of substantial sections of the building causing collateral damage to the remaining structures. It is extremely unlikely that the entire demolition process would take longer than 20 years. Once the demolition is complete the substantial mass of rubble would not be broken down much further by the plants, instead it will begin to be enclosed in deposits of earth, Initially formed by the break down of plant matter from those destroyed by the collapse. It is likely that hardy grasses and shrubs would take root within this soil in a very short period after the demolition and not inconceivable that the site would develop into scrubland within the next 10 to 20 years.

A Time to Act

While it has taken 30/40 years to reach the apex of the current paradigm, it may not take so long to rudely reawaken in the next, and so it is imperative that the actions advocated within this proposal are put into effect with the utmost haste. If set in motion it will be a revolution in the purest sense; a repudiation and thorough replacement of the established political system, yet its cause will ensure the longevity of its effect, for it shall exist without an audience and so will have no need for review.

The proposal should not be seen as negation, but rather negation of negation, that its advocates shall never reap what they sow is far from iniquitous it is instead the point.

The grain as such ceases to exist, it is negated, and in its place appears the plant which has arisen from it, the negation of the grain. But what is the normal life-process of this plant? It grows, flowers, is fertilised and finally once more produces grains of barley, and as soon as these have ripened the stalk dies, is in its turn negated. As a result of this negation of the negation we have once again the original grain of barley, but not as a single unit, but ten-, twenty- or thirty-fold"¹²

¹² Engels, Friedrich, Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft. MEW, Vol. 20. Berlin. Dietz 1878

ARCHETYPE I: PROTOTYPES FOR A POST-APOCALYPTIC CITY

*A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words but their tasks*¹³

May 2007, Titnore, West Sussex. Let me begin with a reflection on a series of key terms, written whilst I was resting on a couch, suspended 30 feet off the ground, hoisted on a tree; attempting to analyze the functioning of a treesitting protest site through it's vocabulary:

Tree: Living amongst it's branches the tree-sitter forces the logging companies to halt the cutting down of forests, as by endangering the life of the activist companies risk lengthy court battles, fines and possible closure. The tree inherits a quality alien to it's common definition, on top of becoming a refuge it becomes a strategic node, a logistic necessity, an element of a battlefield. Lengths of climbing rope form a network between the trees allowing for fast access across the suspended web.

Temporality: the concept of property becomes precarious, refuges are exchanged, shared, constructed collectively, appropriated, the 'home' ceases to belong to the realm of commodification. The suspended refuges host kitchens, viewpoints, communal sleeping hubs and it is not uncommon that at the end of a protest (when a judge expresses a verdict in favour or against the logging company) the protesters burn the material that had sheltered them for years, before collecting parts of it which were recyclable and moving on to another site.

Suspended micro-communities: These protest sites represent first and foremost models of sustainable development, the strict use of recycled material (doors, frames and windows often coming from nearby skips), D.I.Y. insulation methods, solar panels as sole form of energy supply and hanging hydroponic gardens. The protest involves nearby communities and it is not uncommon to find spontaneous support groups in local villages and towns; allowing for both a point of contact and communication with what lies outside the confines of the protest camp, and collection point for donations in the form of money, or surplus of clothes, ropes and edibles in winter.

Construction: building involves the senses, experience in constructing solid treeshouses is handed down verbally from protester to protester; narrative substitutes planimetry, touch substitutes calculation, instinct prevails over architectural rationality; one must test and know the limits of tolerance in terms of weight and time that a tree can endure, with the constant knowledge of the possibility of collapse, of falling and of failure.

Walking the humid pathways strewn with leaves in Camp Bling, and later Nine Ladies (two treesitting protest sites respectively in Titnore and Stanton Moore, UK) at the beginning of spring 2007; yet it may have felt partially like 1850, and partially like 2050. This 200 year

¹³ G.Bataille, in Athey, 1997, 'Visions of Excess', p. 31

time gap was suddenly breached. Electricity was scarce and used mostly to run a few laptops and charge mobile phones, candlelight and bonfires lit late night drunken rambles, faces dropped in and out of the shadow frequently, huddled in blankets, under a sky pregnant with rain. That very rain that would then cascade into large tarpauling sheets stretched out between the oaks and sycamores and end up in rainwater collection units, filtered (using stockings and sand pits) and drank in broken mugs and pint glasses the local pub owner had once left outside the camp. That would be the same water you'd have to use to wash yourself and your clothes as well as water you cooked with; taps, basins, showerheads and a flushing toilets were luxuries you quickly forgot. In Titnore the alternative was filling a 20 liter plastic bucket to the top at a stream using a pulley, and carrying it 600 yards on your back, feeling the weight push your soles against the rock. Either way you suddenly became very aware of the preciousness of each single drop. Every, single, drop.

The structures where as futuristic and provocative as some projects I'd seen in 1970s Archigram magazines yet the windows and doors clearly belonged to dilapidated Victorian houses, the wind howling violently through the crevices. Growing crops occurred at various heights, from small lettuce and radish plots on the ground to hydroponic gardens 30 feet up, rationing food and resources according to the growing and shrinking population of the camp. Toilets where as rudimental as they can get with the choice of a pre-dug hole in the earth or digging a hole for yourself as far from camp as you could trek. If you got cold in winter (and boy did it get cold) you'd simply have to layer your suspended hut with another blanket, then another sheet of plastic, hoping the whole thing wouldn't collapse on you whilst you slept.

Yet this very sense of danger, trepidation and anxiety both actuated in the constant fear of falling, of houses collapsing, and in the possibility of having to fight the loggers off at any moment was the driving motor, the rush of adrenaline that kept the protesters there, living with a mountain-climbing harness resting on their hips. Once the attack would surpass so would the significance of the camp, and after 10 years, Flora, Ellis and the other inhabitants of Nine-Ladies packed up and left like they had never set foot in Stanton Moore. The protection of the vertical confines of the camp was the battle enacted on a weekly basis, when the men with fluorescent jackets would turn their helmet-covered heads up and smirk, the loggers were there.

The dynamics of protection of the forest were akin to those of protecting a country in case of war, yet it was 'protection' of a different kind than that often exasperated through warfare on a national scale, it was a protection of a slice of the 'common', threatened by private interest. Could this be one potential future of war-scenarios? A post-apocalyptic battle for the 'common' waged between civilian eco-warriors and slaves of capitalist corporations? However absurd and surreal this question may seem it is one possible scenario, after all these protest camps encompassed practical confrontations with a number of issues we have been debating for over twenty years: peak oil, earth overshoot day, ecological debt, terminal decline. We were going to *have* to live like this soon enough and I was partially excited at the prospect.

Yet, it was the manner in which this futuristic 'war dynamic' articulated social relations which was interesting, pointing out towards the real possibility of a concrete social anarchist movement. On the ground both in Titnore and Nine-Ladies the manner in which the activists managed both the camp and their 'war' strategy fully supported the anarchic

idea of a decentralized anti-hierarchical community; allowing for hierarchy only within the limits of its temporary settlement and only within the conception of the communal and egalitarian sharing of resources, skills and goods, much in the tradition of Bakunin's socially-centered anarchy:

*No-one rises above the others, or if he does rise, it is only to fall back a moment later, like the waves of the sea forever returning to the salutary level of equality*¹⁴

There were weekly meetings at both camps, a scrawled time and date handwritten with thick markers across damp pieces of cardboard and nailed somewhere at a crossway. One felt the duty, not the obligation, to attend; in terms of coercion these are two very different psychological states. The meetings would include the assigning of roles: who would go to court, who would collect water, who would cook, who would walk to the closest town to find an odd job for a week or two, visit the support group, collect the post. No need to mention that in a group of 30 some form of direct democracy is still plausible, dare I say *attainable*. Catherine remarked that was always some who didn't help, especially when it got cold, that's when it got hard. She shrugged her shoulders and that was it, it was no place for idealists.

What if I closed my eyes and thought of escaping from the schizophrenic urban landscapes of Code 64 and ended up here, in this paradoxical futuristic-cum-semi-archaic scenario: archetype I. What if the world was now composed of thousands of decentralised micro-communities that recycled scraps from now decaying industrial centres and built their villages suspended between trees? what if sustainability and political autonomy could be achieved at these scales? I thought of Hakim Bey's communiqué n.7, and how it perfectly described the aspirations of the camp:

*We have no interest in going "back to the land" if the deal includes the boring life of a shit-kicking peasant--nor do we want "tribalism" if it comes with taboos, fetishes & malnutrition. We have no quarrel with the concept of culture--including technology; for us the problem begins with civilization.*¹⁵

For the activists the problem began with 'civilisation', at least with the current conception of it. Constant capital accumulation and unbound consumption, that was the core, that was the link between the enacting of protest in 2007 and the possible scenarios of 2050 as I have tried to describe them. I cannot tell you what it felt like to live in 2050 but I know I lived there, for a brief time, at Archetype I, and anyway, as novelist Pat Frank writes in the opening paragraph of 'Alas, Babylon', 'to someone who has never felt a bomb, a bomb is only a word'.

¹⁴ Bakunin in Joll, 1979, 'The Anarchists', pg.91-92

¹⁵ Hakim Bey, T.A.Z. 'Ontological Anarchy, poetic terrorism', 1985, pg.43

INTENSITIES OF LABOUR: FROM AMPHETAMINE TO COCAINE

I

At the end of the 1960s young and cocky Situationists like myself talked of the Japanese economic miracle – because then it was the Japanese miracle –as being fuelled by amphetamine. The evidence was anecdotal, but it was well known that the cheaply-made drug was a major business for the Yakuza. This particular miracle was manufacturing-based, electronics and autos figured prominently. In modern parlance, it was Fordist.

Amphetamine, known to us then as an all-night dancing drug, was perfect for long hours of work while staying alert. As we saw it, the miracle depended on disposable workers subject to early burn out. A modern version of Marx's picture of capital and labour as the Vampire and its victims.

Since then, in the richest parts of the world, the decline in the relative size of the manufacturing sector is common knowledge, though it may now be levelling out. At the same time the shift to a services-based economy has involved what Maurizio Lazzarato has called an anthropo-sociological shift in the organisation of what is called immaterial labour. The generic term post-Fordist has come to be an umbrella description of these changes. These changes are real, but to see them as forming a discontinuity with what went before is too sleek in manipulating theoretical categories and leapfrogging the realities of global work.

The most common global economic model now is the super-exploitation of pre-Fordist sweatshops and a peasantry pressured from all sides. Fordism where it exists is far from played out though often without the Keynesian virtue of the producing labour being able to buy what it produces. In the rich world too, sites of "primitive accumulation" co-exist with Fordist and post-Fordist labour which itself is always subject to Taylorism in its production processes. As a new form of the organisation of labour, as Lazzarato recognises at an abstract level, the latter began in the manufacturing sector. As more subdued Situationists in the 70s we talked of the model of team systems in Swedish car plants as self-exploitation.. Since then in the rich world itself –UK public services like education and health being clear examples – whilst there are rhetorics of individual initiative, 'service' work is subject to the crudest Taylorism, or Stalinism as some have called it, with its plethora of targets.

What remains globally common is capital's compulsion to accumulate. For individual capitals one has only to read the financial pages of most newspapers to see that the health of companies or otherwise, is seen through this lens. Since the start of the general capitalist offensive in the mid 70s, the pressure has been on wages, intensity of labour and the length of the working day, while it has made its own compulsion into a natural state of affairs. Much of this pressure is disguised by the mechanisms of the equalization of rates of profit to make an average rate, whereby surplus value produced by labour-intensive sectors of production are realized by other 'capital-intensive' ones.

But these pressures, despite enormous differences in real wages, are also global, with the push for greater intensity of labour common, though taking very different forms.

What for example of the privileged sector of immaterial labour as defined by Lazzarato: “audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities etc...activities which tend to define and fix cultural artistic norms, fashions, tastes, consumer standards and, more strategically, public opinion.” Descriptions of this work in the ‘immaterial labour’ canon however do not look at the intensities of labour involved. The widespread availability of cocaine in the UK for example obviously has to do with a range of factors – the nature of some Latin American economies and their staggering inequalities, sophisticated criminal organisation, the increasing rise in the worldwide transportation of material goods and so on –but it has also been the perfect drug for this relatively privileged sector; perfect for an indiscriminate intensity of enthusiasm, and creative endeavour for the projects provided in this sector, and for believing in the importance of what one is doing at any given time.

II

Just out of prison in the early 1990s and in urgent need of finding a way back into the world and some legitimate income, preferably PAYE, I was lucky to get a job in the small world of overnight news clippings provision. True, I was made for the job but was lucky in two ways: no one asked for any CV, you could do it or not after a test for spotting names in newspapers; and PAYE put you back in the legitimate world with no questions asked. Unlucky in that it was not so good for the health, night shift with pressure. At that time, the business was pre-digital, and there is still a niche market for Chief Executives and the like, who want their clippings neatly cut and pasted on to headed paper, or at least hard copy photocopies.

The photocopy machines were the crucial items of equipment and, apart from a hard-working fax machine the only ‘fixed’ capital in the place. Otherwise it was more than just pre-digital. The building in Tooley Street –old, old London- was mass-produced gothic. The two floors occupied by the agency were covered in stained beige carpeting that turned up at the edges to show the nibbled grey foam underneath. The system demanded not just the photocopy machines (which, it turns out, have been sites of power in institutions controlled by New Labour: target, guideline, and management structure production in hard copy), but wall-to-wall pigeon holes. Pigeon holes! Even then they were antique.

Each pigeon hole belonged to individual or collective clients, the odd one that was interesting, but mostly corporate bastards and financial PR bastards with their own client list. Most cuttings would go to more than one pigeonhole, ten and more were possible. Hence the importance of the photocopier. Anywhere between two and four in the morning there could be sharp confrontations about access rights to the two, or sometimes three machines on the go. And then it might be luck if the bastard you’d got hold of, didn’t jam somewhere down the line. Sometimes it would clap out altogether and we’d be down to two or just one machine for the night. Things would then get ultra- manic. Other times with luck or skill, down on your knees, you’d sort it yourself, easing the mashed up A4 out a roller or gripper with it leaving any scraps behind.

The only guides to help with this extra job were inadequate diagrams stamped somewhere on the copiers surfaces. They may well have been stamped on by someone like Zhang Guo Hua, a Chinese worker who had entered the country illegally and died after doing a 24 hour shift doing a similar stamping job.

We instead, the Readers, were mostly odd balls, ex-art students, and long term ex students still paying off debts, and me, getting a foothold back on the 'real world': erratic petit bourgeois. The job involved reading a morning paper, or two or three, first editions arriving between 10.30pm and 11p m, and cutting out any article of any interest to any client, and noting the other clients who would be interested in the same piece: the client/subject list ran to many pages. You might say get The Independent, The Mail, and the Star. Or if it was the Financial Times, it might just be The Express in addition. Or just the Mirror. Whatever, the job required sticking the correct tab, date plus name of paper, on each cutting, and then dividing them into two piles. Some were to be mounted on various types of A4 as originals for big cheese clients with that kind of fetish; the others to be photocopied on re-usable A4 in order that shadow did not appear.

In addition to us, oddball petit bourgeois, there were some oddball proletarians, pals of one of two bosses, who did clipping mounting at this stage of the procedure, so that as a reader, one could get to the photocopier with both mounted and unmounted clippings. After that first bout at the machines things got really crazy. You'd read, photocopied, distributed the mass of stuff into umpteen pigeon-holes and then geared up for another fight for photocopier access. From reading plus first stage filtering, the new shared out responsibility was to prepare the packages for the clients. Various bastards at Barclays Bank or Price Waterhouse would like their clippings filtered into sections of interest so that at 6.30 am they were ready for anything; at worst a routine grilling if the news was bad.

Deadlines were never met in a wholly relaxed manner. Around 5.30am the drivers, cabbies and independents, impatient for the packages they were to deliver were hovering. Other nights as the dawn arose over the river Thames things got seriously manic. Lou the Taxi driver would be on my earhole to forget everything else and finish the Food and Drink Federation Package first so that he could get away. Other times we'd be dragged into other packages, a Financial PR company wanting photocopy only, but mounted on its headed paper. All this so that some corporate bastard didn't have to read the paper himself. All this with the additional pressure that a 'miss' might mean the end of a contract. A spectacular hit on the other hand, a corporate name mention in a murder mystery story say, would get at most a 'good spot' mention. There were several nights after a bad-sleep day, random car alarms wanting to have their say, I would take a lick of amphetamine powder myself.

III

This was underpaid intensity of labour, which Marx describes plainly enough as 'expenditure of labour in a given time' in Capital. (Volume I I, Chapters 17 and 21). Increased intensity, along with the length of the working day, he contrasts to what he calls the 'productiveness' of labour as means of increasing the production of similar units by each worker. It is a contrast because increases caused by the 'productiveness' of labour,

improved machinery which has involved a fixed capital outlay, and which he calls “productive force does not increase the value or surplus value of the aggregate units produced, whereas increases in intensity and length of the working day will do so. This contrast becomes of importance in Volume III. (Chapter 14) in which he outlines countervailing phenomena to what he calls The Tendency of Profit to Fall, a tendency caused precisely by the increase weight placed on ‘productiveness’ in the production mix.

Such distinctions ought to be helpful in deconstructing the notion of ‘productivity’. In the 1960s and 70s explicitly named productivity deals were prevalent, and the notion continues to lurk in nearly all capital-labour negotiations to the degree that there are still such negotiations. There is however a problem with this Marxist deconstruction, in that ambiguity hangs over the relationship between intensity and productiveness as he describes it. He talks of the relative number of spindles as against the number of people employed in an international comparison. At one end France with one person per 14 spindles, and Britain with one per 78, but this does not tell us about the nature of the spindles. Are the British ones so technically superior that minding 78 does not involve a greater ‘expenditure of labour in a given time’ than minding 12. More specifically does technically superior necessarily mean less work per machine. The text here (Volume I Ch 22) is not so helpful either. “In proportion as capitalist production is developed in a country, in the same proportion do the national intensity and productivity there rise above the international labour.”

The notion of the intensity of labour however, as well as length of the working day, is a valid one absolutely relevant to the present day capitalist offensive by its compulsion to accumulate and the associated aim of social control. Often, and in the Fordist model openly, there have been increases in what might be called ‘pure’ intensity of labour. What they called speed-up. For a long period this was the area of labour-capital conflict in the car industry. As a measure of intensity, it was said that to work ‘on the line’ at Ford itself, 15 years was the maximum possible. What has been hidden is how much the development of other types of machinery to increase the productiveness of labour has been dedicated to demanding a greater intensity of labour from those operating it rather than as we might say, the machine taking the strain.

In the 1960s and 70s both intellectually and in practice there was a recognition that – despite the illusions on offer of more and more leisure time for the worker and what was he/she going to do with it – machinery developed under capitalism did not, and never had had taking the strain as its objective. In the early 1960s in powerful writing for the first issues of *Quaderni Rossi* (at the very beginning of the Italian autonomist movement), Ranieri Panzieri, whilst holding on to Marxist class analysis, overturned his notion of “productive forces” being somehow neutral, let alone reaching the point of making capitalist relations of production untenable. Instead he argued, “the relations of production are within the productive forces; that technical development “presents itself as a development of capitalism...as an exhibition of the capitalist’s authority...and with new possibilities for the consolidation of its power.”

‘Fordism’, if looked at as productive processes, was and is shot through with ‘Taylorism’, with the time and motion study as its analytical tool. Harry Braverman in *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, quite rightly saw both as being aimed at the de-skilling of labour and a consequent reduction of its economic and political power. In the car industry of the 1970s this was aimed at the de-skilling of draughtsmen and factory engineers as punch hole NCs

were introduced on the factory floor. At the same time they increased surveillance and control of jobs done on the line. This had a double impact on worker organisation. It radicalized draughtsmen and engineers in the newly formed TASS trade union. The most radical inside that union formed most famously the alternative plan for Lucas Areospace in which machinery for arms production could be re-jigged into making socially useful products especially for the disabled.

In the case of Ford itself, 'on the line' workers created an international organisation autonomous from the official trade union set-up. The Ford Workers Combine was an international organisation at shop steward level capable of co-ordinating solidarity actions internationally, and it was also imaginative in its tactics which had a precision formed from a clear understanding of the productive process and changes in it.

More generally at this time, increases in intensity of labour were met with go-slows, or fights over tea-breaks. These latter were subject too much soggy bourgeois satire: tea breaks, Ho Ho Ho. More often there was, a transference of this conflict into the area of wages. This tended to disappoint various leftists talking about 'economism' in true Leninist fashion, but the level of sophisticated militancy was enough to have a systematic targeting of the pound sterling, as well as the Italian lira, by the US Treasury team of the Ford Administration lead by William Simon, something they were able to do in a floating exchange rate world dominated by a petrodollar boosted US dollar, and making speeches to 'the market' on this score. This offensive scared the life out of the Trade Union leadership. Nevertheless until the capitalist offensive that had been kicked off in this manner was augmented by a new era of de-skilling, and anti-union legislation, resistance to increases in intensity of labour continued

IV

Machinery, the very word has an old-fashioned ring to it, too heavy for economies that are 'light' and 'flexible'. In the mid 1990s when I first dipped my toe into what might loosely be called the digital economy, 'kit' was the favoured word. In more advanced sectors, the kit became desk space, rentable for a given length of time, and in itself making the conditions for new intensities of labour.

This dipping the toe involved a part-time removals business, specializing in creative digital office moves -- into Soho or out, then into Clerkenwell or out --and some months back in the news clippings business, but this time working the first months of an on-line service. This involved a different intensity of labour to that of hard-copy clippings for which there was still a demand. The reading of the papers remained the same, as was the size of the reading list, the number of papers per person rather higher, but there was none of that battling with the photocopier or the walks around the pigeon-holes with armfuls of A4. Instead, a template existed on screen in which with the Tab key you could set up date a name of paper; then a box for the headline of selected articles; then another box in which to give a one or two sentence summary of what it said; and finally a box in which to key in the codes for all the clients who might, or should, be interested in the relevant article.

Whether any of this work could be said to have created surplus value is dubious, it was by and large an aid to financial PR which creams off a margin of surplus value it has not itself

created. Spin they call it these days. The work however was profitable, and the company grew even before I left. As an individual, I found its intensity less onerous though night-shift work is bad for your health whatever the work, the evidence is legion. What it shared with the hard-copy business was its dependence on loyalty to ones fellow workers. Team loyalty, or in our case, shift loyalty was factored into the accounts consciously or not, by the employers. This is hardly special, they say it is how armies work, how even the mass suicides of World War I continued month after month. Don't let down your mates. In the hard-copy job it was absurd, people tottering into work with the flu and giving it to the rest of us simply because they knew that the night's mania would be that much the greater without them. A related similarity was knowing that too many 'misses' would lose contracts, and that lost contracts would mean job losses.

With the on-line work there were however more ways of avoiding the intensity of labour which the process seemed to involve, which was the writing of two line summaries of relevant articles. Very soon I had developed a set of bland summary templates. And, however, underpaid and intensive as it was, it bears no relation to the conditions of work in data-processing shitwork in a Jamaican Export Processing Zone. RSI is a reality, ask anyone who has ever suffered, or see how much corporate money has gone into legally proving that it does not exist. Export Processing Zones almost by definition, rule out health and safety considerations or regulations.

V

More recently it is another of Marx's 'countervailing' phenomena, the length of the working day that has attracted most attention. It has come from four directions; social psychological concerns about 'work providing meaning to people's lives; heroic accounts of how very rich people like those working for the McKinsey consulting firm, or investment banks work very long hours; grasping the material realities of new forms of exploitation, perverted forms like being on call all the time but being paid only for the hours that you work; and Trade Unions now addressing the matter of overtime. Small attention has also been given to cases like Zhang Guo Hua in Cleveland, UK, and in China itself of He Chun-Mei, a 30 year old woman, both of whom died after working 24 hour shifts. Such realities can provoke only grim mirth at slobbering accounts of Investment Bankers working 15 hour days in the Business and now the Feature pages of newspapers. Working 15 hours a day to make sure they get their cut of the 24 hour days of super-exploitation.

In the UK this emphasis on the length of the working day is hardly surprising given the long-drawn out resistance to the European Union's 48 hour working directive from the New Labour government and its supposedly 'Old Labour' Chancellor. Figures from Prof Carey Cooper Of Lancaster University showed:

- the UK having the longest working hours in the Western world after the USA, having now surpassed those of Japan.
- in the last seven years, coinciding with the rule of New Labour, there has been a significant rise in employees working in excess of 48 hours; from 10% in the late 1990s to 26% in 2005.
- since 1992 there has been a leap of 50% in women expected to do a 48 hour week.
- estimates in the 2000-2 period suggest that those doing a 60 hour week has increased by one third to be approximately 17% of the total workforce.

Professor Cooper's inquiry determined that if a person worked consistently long hours it would damage their psychological and physical health. Once again, we are talking 'burn-out', and it is here that length of the working day and intensity of labour (those sure-fire ways of extracting more surplus-value), are likely to have the same effect. Taken in combination as in the cases of Hu Chen-Mei and Zhang Guo Hua, they are likely to be fatal.

That they may be combined at all reflects the defeats of the labour movement that, for the moment, we are having to live with. In 1979, 'the winter of discontent' – as some wise men had it-- I was working as a dustman in South Wales. Our crew had the Swansea areas of Townhill and Mayhill. We had a tough schedule with bins that were always either up or down stairs, and had to be returned when emptied. But the routes, the tasks were fixed, and it was job and finish. It was like going to the gym, we worked at speed and with luck I'd be home and washed by midday. Such a life for workers was obviously intolerable for organised capital. If such a person could work at such speed for 5-6 hours, why not make it eight. Two hours of hanging around would have been intolerable enough, the humiliation and boredom so well described in Ed Dorn's novel *By The Sound*, but there was to be none of that. More streets per crew with a small, and conditional pay rise was the result.

If conflict over intensity of labour was often partly transferred into negotiations over wages, this has also been true of length of the working day, of overtime and how it is paid. If it is unpaid it is a form of increased surplus value as theft. If it is paid at the normal hourly rate, it indicates the relative powerlessness; and then whether it is at time-and-a-quarter or double time will reflect the relative strength of labour organisation. But Unions are now listening to cases of forced overtime even where proper payment has been made. The advantage to a whole range of capitals is obvious. Even if there is a pay incentive, it will be cheaper than hiring new workers or even taking on agency temps.

VI

In Chapter Ten of a remarkably pragmatic account of the British Economy, Malcolm Sawyer offers an account of intensity of labour that sounds like Marx, "the flow of work to workers has become steadily more efficient." We may baulk at the neutrality of 'efficiency' in this context, but he goes beyond Marx however in nailing down this intensity. "The immediate factors that have generated harder work are changes in technology and work organisation augmented by information technology." Intensity is nailed down as working harder, and that this has been increased by developments in the forces of production/productiveness of labour as defined by Marx as somehow separate phenomena. Sawyer cannot nail it down quantitatively however but in some 'extreme' circumstances it has stood out. Salvati describing 'rationalization without investment' in 1960s Italy reckoned that productivity in the 1964-9 period rose at a very fast rate, as fast as in the 1950s, and yet the rate of increase in industrial investment was zero. And if Sawyer cannot make such a measurement he is clear about its impact: "Work intensification makes a contribution to growing productivity in the UK economy, although its quantitative influence cannot be measured." It cannot be measured but he goes on to say but "there are natural and social limits to the extent that work can be intensified, so it is doubtful whether further intensification is beneficial for long-term economic growth. Moreover, there is evidence of

links between work overload and ill health, especially work-related stress, that suggests there are substantial hidden costs even in the short-run.”

Costs to who? Sawyer, like Professor Cooper, is assuming at least some objective interest in worker well-being, but there is no evidence that British business takes much interest in this type of long-term.

‘The long-term’ on the cheap has been more to its taste. Historically its strategy has been to suck out whatever it has had going for it right down to the last two pence, then whinge. Now it has a government which portrays health and safety regulations as ‘red tape’ as if they were the whim of pedantic bureaucrats, jobsworths or fanatics. At the same time ‘burn-out’, the very notion of it, our picture of the speed-fed Japanese worker forty years ago, has been expropriated by the language of genius and management.

It is both far more common and brutal than that, ‘burn-out’ is the modern version of Marx’s picture of capital as vampire. In a recent report by the V.V. Giri Institute, India on call centres in that country, they talk of graduates as cyber-coolies and the level of burn out due to the intensity of labour. The Institute has its own concern about the work as de-skilling, but has no difficulty in measuring this intensity, it is the quota of emails and calls to be dealt with in a given time. Sawyer cannot quantify intensity, but we can be sure that those dedicated long hour McKinsey folk have the templates for doing it. With its slogan that everything can be measured, and what is measured can be managed (Taylorism intact in the post-Fordist world), it could hardly be otherwise. At the same time as the Institute’s report, McKinsey did one of its own which warned that as wages rose in India and the supply of ‘skilled’ workers tightened, its advantages, English language use for one, relative to China and Eastern Europe would erode.

This threat, and its possible realization, is a commonplace of globalization (the globalization of existing power structures and relations of production), one which by sleight-of-hand co-exists with its advantages for everyone in its own rhetoric. In the case of Indian call-centres we can see that it is a threat used globally. The McKinsey study highlights the matter of wages, and as described by Marx, and understood by unionized labour, intensity of labour cannot be abstracted from wage levels. In the world Marx describes both are also sites of national class struggles, so that he can talk of socially determined benchmarks of intensity and wages in different countries. Despite the dynamics of globalization of production, these benchmarks, what with the history of colonialism and its impact, remain very different in different parts of the world. In some places there is a refusal of intensity despite wage promises, but mostly it is an involuntary situation.

It is then both unreal and unjust to compare global intensities of labour when there are such differences in wage levels. But this not-comparing doesn’t make looking at some features which are common to intensity and wage conflicts. In the news clippings business, loyalty to fellow workers was factored in, along with a culture of frenzy that became normal. This was partly due to the time interval between first editions of the newspapers and the dawn delivery time for the packages, but more to the number of workers per shift. The small number, and thus the intensity, was justified by the existence of competition, competitive pricing and the rest.

These same pressures are – despite the huge range of wage difference – becoming globally common. Pricing oneself out of a job is a threat made even to the lowest-paid, and this ‘pricing’ factors in the level of intensity. It takes different forms and comes to the same thing, speed-up, downsizing, it is working harder in a given time. At the same time the most primitive imaginable Taylorism has been given a new lease of life by technologies of surveillance. Call Centres have gained some notoriety for the policing of toilet breaks, the random listening in to check performance and so on, but it goes far wider than that. Modern technologies in the interest of primitive accumulation, allow capital to check where each worker is at any given time and, in many cases, what he/she has been doing at any given moment.

VII

Milan Kundera has described, how post the 1968 invasion, many Czech dissidents managed to get certain ‘manual jobs’, and found them liberating. Kundera is not the most reliable witness of anything outside of himself, but there is a ring of truth to this account despite the absence of detail about these jobs. You could stay out of trouble without compromising your integrity, and the work by its very repetition without the intensity, allowed a freedom to think. Such jobs, I suspect, are thin on the ground these days, especially in the modern Czech Republic, still less in Slovakia which is taking on a China-like bogeyman image for Western workers and perhaps even Indian ones too. There is no freedom to think in a call centre.

Instead we get management gurus talking of how “passionate employees get better results” as quoted by Madeleine Bunting in *Willing Slaves*. What is this, Passionate?! As young English Situationists we found stories of Company mass prayers or mass exhortations, mainly Japanese, both funny and scary, and imagined dissident workers taking the piss. Now such things are just plain scary and have a strong whiff of fundamentalism. There is no room for dissidents at Asda or Orange, Bunting tells us. What their and other managements aim for, is to use the concepts of both brand loyalty and teamwork to give meaning to peoples’ lives, she says. Various opinion polls purport to show the general success of such strategies. All this, while it is also a commonplace that there are no jobs for life.

This at least is equally true of the privileged sector of immaterial labour described by Lazzarato. Privileged it is, but often working on short-term contracts. It is the privileged version of the outrageous super-exploitation of workers permanently on call but paid only for the hours worked. At the BBC, six-month contracts are common; at the Guardian’s small film documentary offshoot, two months, though this is better at least than month-by-month contracts being enforced by Group4 Securicor in South Africa. For people with special talents in this privileged sector and with very high earning-power, such a system is not stressful, but further down the production chain of even such privileged labour, the next job is not guaranteed.

Instead, on each job the mantra that “passionate employees get the best results” is the norm even when this is not true. It is not enough to produce a graphic in which a globe spins round to show Bob Geldof’s face on one side and a map of Africa on the other competently and without fuss. No, you are required also to believe that it is of the greatest

importance. There is an intensity of labour in this sector that requires of you that you believe it, and show that you believe it. And in this small world word gets around. You have to 'fit in' as McKinsey says of its people: you can be as clever as clever can be, work those heroic long hours, but you've also got to fit in.

In the privileged sector of commodified cultural production, cocaine has proved to be the ideal drug in that it produces an intensity of importance about whatever is in front of it, and the long hours of concentration needed to make something of it, and a likely disregard of the length of the working day and how it may continue into your officially not-working time. It may be losing its exclusive cachet as news comes in of Derbyshire commuters snorting the stuff, but it does have these qualities. Amphetamine, with its tendency to endless digression would be quite unsuitable. The price ratio of cocaine to amphetamine hovers between 12 and 20:1 Given the labour time involved in cocaine's production and infrastructure compared to the fairly basic and cheap chemicals needed to make 'speed' in Eastern Europe likely as not, this reflects certain realities. Given that incomes in the privileged sector are greater than many in the world by more than such ratios, then the cocaine user as labour will have got the best of the deal, which in turn holds down the cost of the reproduction of labour power in this sector of production.

Such disparities in wages, incomes and consumption possibilities makes proclamations of the unity of labour resistance to the dictates of capital facile. This does not mean that international solidarities are not, nor can not be forged. At the same time in many parts of the Western world unity is undermined by increasing inequality, and this rise in inequality is in large part due to the weakening of trade unions.

This weakening has been caused not just by rapid technological change and globalization, but by persistent government legislation to this end. Its impact was clearly seen in the UK in last year's Gate Gourmet strike. Everyone working for a wage should be in a Trade Union. Easy to say, and made very difficult in practice, but there is a greater chance of success if certain cultural/ideological battles are fought with vigour.

At its most general the claims of neo-liberalism and governments ideologically committed to it, to be modern or modernising, something especially important in the UK where each move New Labour makes to the most archaic view of the world is presented as modernising, has to be challenged on that ground. Its presentation of trade unions as dinosaurs is laughable. Compare the Respect Festivals (not the Galloway/SWP party) initiated by the unions with New Labour's Dome and its risible Cool Britannia. For the more privileged sectors of immaterial labour such a challenge demands the re-creation of proletarian values, most of all that whatever else you go to work for the wage, and never mind the flim-flam. Despite a failure to unionize, this at least was a shared point-of-view of news clippings workers, and we forced a new shift system that greatly reduced the length of the working month.

More recently an example has been given by scriptwriters working for Fox TV on reality TV shows in the USA. It may be hard to have much sympathy for the writers on reality TV shows (nor with workers for Group4 Securicor) but that is beside the point. We don't know if cocaine was part of their diet, but it is said they were being forced to skip meals, submit fake time cards and work more than 80 hours a week. Now with the backing of the Writers Guild they are taking legal action as are other writers against other TV companies. Zachary Isenberg, one of the plaintiffs in the Fox lawsuit complied with much of this

because he was keen to get on in television. But, he said “I spend almost my entire waking time at work. I enjoy my job and want to keep doing it, but I also know there comes a certain point where you have to stand up for yourself.”