Animal Spirits

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A Bestiary of the Commons

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Hoe groter de geest, hoe groter het beest.

[The greater the spirit, the greater the beast]

Traditional Dutch saying[1]

Introduction

What constitutes the common? While I was exploring the dark sides of digital commons and culture industry, the awakening of the *animal spirits* of the financial crisis during 2008 became in fact the horizon of the political debate. The idea of investigating the *animal spirits* of the commons was actually conceived a few years earlier, when the global mediascape following stock indexes were fed by the pornography of war terrorism. Yet the irrational fears and forces struggling behind media networks were never illuminated by critical thinkers and political activists or, more specifically, considered as a *productive* component of economic flows. John Maynard Keynes once defined 'animal spirits' as precisely those unpredictable human drives that influence stock markets and push economic cycles.[1] Similarly, in his recent work, Paolo Virno has underlined how all institutions (from the nation-state to contemporary digital networks) represent an extension of the aggressive instincts of humankind.[2] In this reading, language and culture form the basis of the common (*networking*), but also new fields of antagonism and chaos (*notworking*).[3]

While the playground of Free Culture is celebrated and defended today only on the basis of copyright legalese like Creative Commons, a vast bestiary of conflicts is propagating beneath the new factory of culture. In this book, while avoiding any reactionary position on such phenomena, I explore how *animal spirits* belong to the contemporary notion of multitude and also positively innervate the *production of the common*. Against the 'creative destruction' of value characteristic of stock markets that has become the political condition of current times, a redefinition of the commons is needed and urgent.[4] Besides the familiar mantra of supply-and-demand, a purely imaginary fabrication of value is today a key component of the financial game.[5] What might occur if the urban and network multitudes enter this valorization game and recover a common power over the fragile chain of value production?

The common is not an independent realm. It is a dynamic object that nevertheless falls into a field of forces surrounded and defined by the laws of value and production. The new parasitic forms of network economy and monopolies of communication (from IBM to MySpace) can easily exploit, for instance, the generous stock provided by Free Culture

without imposing any form of traumatic enclosure or strict regime of intellectual property. To debunk a fashionable and superficial political posturing, this book pursues a spectre, a *sub-religion of separation* that has come to dominate media culture, art critique, radical activism and academia over the last decade.[6] The chapters of this book point to three different but contiguous domains that have been conceptualized and celebrated as autonomous spheres or virtuous economies: digital networks and the so-called Free Culture, the culture industry and the European 'creative cities', the mediascape of war terrorism and Internet pornography neutralized by intellectual puritanism.

The separation of these media domains is patrolled by a legion of postmodern thinkers, that are widely employed by cultural theory (especially in the field of art criticism). Authors such as Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek are taken here as a symptom of a typical Western *language fetishism* that locks any potential political gesture in the prison-house of Code. In this confinement, any act of resistance is inhibited as fatalistically reinforcing the dominant ideology. The Empire is suffering its own diseases, but postmodernism indulges its curious claustrophobia. An investment in this critique, however, does not mean a naïve return to good old materialism, but on the contrary, aims to illuminate the *frictions* and conflicts in the interstices between material and immaterial, biological and digital, desire and imaginary. Each sphere of separation cultivates its own inbred languages: *digitalism* and *freeculturalism* in the circuits of network economy, the hype of *creativity* for the culture industries and new city policies, the hysteric *left-wing puritanism* against 'warporn' and 'netporn'. Each sphere hides its peculiar kind of asymmetrical conflict. Undoubtedly, as Giorgio Agamben suggests, the profanation of these hidden separations is the political task of the coming political generations.[7]

Crucially, these three separated spheres are coextensive with three forms of commons, whose glorious autonomy is haunted and infested here by three conceptual beasts: the corporate parasite of the digital commons, the hydra of gentrification behind the 'creative cities', the bicephalous eagle of power and desire ruling the mediascape of war pornography. This bestiary is introduced to advance a non-dialectical model for media politics and radical aesthetics. In particular, such beasts represent new *biomorphic* concepts to replace the binary abstrac-

tions of postmodernism, such as *simulacra* and *symbolic code*. Moreover, they are not necessarily evil creatures: an alliance with them is the untold of radical thought. The parasite discloses, for instances, the tactical alliance of Free Software with media corporations; the hydra reveals the conflictual and competitive nature of labour in the culture industries; the bicephalous eagle incarnates the fetishism for power and desire that seduces any political imaginary. Together, they constitute a primary bestiary for the age of neo-archaic capitalism, and can hopefully inspire a generation of *new political animals*.

This book attempts a sort of linear Dantesque journey along a steep mediascape: descending from the gnostic plateaux of *digitalism* and pure peer cooperation to the reptilian unconscious of the metropolis beneath the benevolent totalitarianism of the Creative Industries, deep into the underworld of netporn and warporn, unveiling the shadows of an apparently immaculate digital colonization. As an old Dutch-Jewish saying puts it, 'the greater the spirit, the greater the beast'. All immaterial commons have a material basis, and in particular, a *biological* ground. Seeking a new political terrain for media theory through the concept of an *energetic unconscious*, I try to incorporate the *Zeitgeist* of the biosphere (energy crisis, climate change, global warming) into the belly of the mediascape. This energetic interpretation of technology directly contests the dominant paradigm of Media Studies that reduces and neutralizes the network to a dialectics of two internal coordinates: (*digital*) *code* and (*desiring*) *flows*. In contrast, I argue that any system should be defined by the external excess of energy that operates it. Similarly, the puritan activist imperative to 'consume less' will continue to remain ineffective until the capitalist core of production is questioned. Between code and flow, a dystopian vision of desire and economic *surplus* is introduced.

In fact, what is the *creative* gesture that produces the commons? A widespread belief considers creativity as naturally 'good' and immaculate, energy-free and friction-less, untouched by compromise or conflict. A famous slogan shared by the supporters of Free Culture and the *wealth of networks* alike reads: 'Information is non-rival.'[8] In reality, beyond the computer screen, precarious workers and freelancers experience how Free Labour and competition are increasingly devouring their everyday life.[9] Digital commons have become *pseudo-commons*, an ideal space detached from the material basis of production, where surplus-value

and exploitation are virtuously expunged. Indeed, the 'age of digital re-production' has accelerated both immaterial commons and competition in a more general sense. Global financialization, for instance, and its volatile derivatives are also made possible by digitalization. The slogan 'information is non-rival', therefore, has its *doppelgänger*: accumulation of information on the one side feeds speculation and new communication monopolies on the other. The new commons are fragile if they are established only from a formal perspective like that of Creative Commons licences. This book strives for a stronger political definition of the commons and, in particular, investigates the wider material impact and ramifications of the cultural capital.

The ephemeral Creative Cities rising across the European skyline are the latest attempt to incorporate the collective factory of culture into corporate business and real-estate speculation. The *artistic mode of production* has innervated the economy of European cities, but more for the sake of gentrification than for cultural production itself.[10] This critique, however, does not lament the malicious nature of the cultural economy. On the contrary, an invigorated cultural scene can only be established by reversing the chain of value generation. By legitimately expanding the notion of 'creativity' beyond *economic correctness*, this book explains how sabotage can equally be seen as *creative* and productive. Against the old political museum of Fordism, a dynamic and combative definition of the commons is advanced. Neoliberalism first taught everybody the sabotage of value. Sabotage is precisely what is considered impossible within the postmodern parlance (where each gesture supposedly reinforces the dominant regime), or conversely what Antonio Negri considered a form of *self-valorization* during the social struggles of the 1970s.[11] In a dynamic world system shaped by a lunatic and an irrational stock market, the power of *creative destruction* must likewise be understood as belonging also to the contemporary multitudes and the common.

Chapter 1

Animal Spirits: A Conceptual Bestiary

The Diseases of the Empire

> The suburbs dream of violence. Asleep in their drowsy villas, shel-
> tered by benevolent shopping malls, they wait patiently for the
> nightmares that will wake them into a more passionate world ...
> James G. Ballard, *Kingdom Come*

London Sinking: The Psychopathology of Everyday Cultural Life

An oneiric picture, an intestine 911: London's cultural institutions
are under a surreal attack by middle-class rioters. As the guardians of
the national collective imaginary, the National Film Theatre is burnt
down and the BBC is stormed. With black humour, Ballard's novel
Millennium People describes the civil uprising of a petty bourgeoisie.[1]
Heathrow airport is targeted by improbable terrorists, who also raid a
banal cat show guilty of 'atrocities'. 'We middle classes are the new pro-
letariat,' states one of the rioters. London turns against itself in a spiral
of guerrilla warfare against the void.

Outside the fiction, Ballard's urban psychopathology represents an
insightful sample of contemporary Western culture. A decade after the
millennial turn, the civilized former Big Engine of Western capitalism
is sinking. The British pound is devaluated, a mortgage crisis is affect-
ing banks and real estate, oil and food prices are on the rise. In a nodal
postcard to the Continent, London features multitudes of migrants
fretting under lewd Gothic billboards, breathing a thick and acrid air at
the border of the financial City. Third-World suburbs are growing in the
courtyard of the Commonwealth. Wall Street veterans and *The Economist*,
meanwhile, offer practical advice to elite managers: move to the country-
side, buy a farm, stock food, keep a gun ready, prepare for barbarians.[2] A
civil warming blows together with the winds of the global warming. Dein-
dustrialization has been exceeded, a digital humanity rediscovers the old
state of nature. In the 1930s, Keynes defined the irrational and unpre-
dictable forces struggling behind stock markets and pushing economic
cycles as *animal spirits*.[3] Among the financial chimeras and wars for com-
bustible fossils, the rampant economies of the East and the downshifting
of the West, these bestial forces resurface in a neo-archaic world.

As the narratives and themes of the post-Seattle movement fade
into oblivion, how does radical theory respond to the impending *civil*

warming? Any bookstore can reveal a gradual transition in the collective consciousness over the past decade: technology and network issues have been replaced by energy and environment (with war remaining a consistent backdrop). Discourse around globalization has slowed: mainly because of the oil crisis, the neoliberal paradigm has shifted back to an *energetic* one. If globalization was the highest, albeit abstract, incarnation of evil for many activists, the energetic hysteria reinforces a peculiar apocalyptic puritanism and (typically Anglo-Saxon) abstinence, moving to a kind of interior trench. Anti-globalization resistance becomes carbon footprint activism, defined by negation, containing the ascetic gesture: 'consume less'. Only a more Continental and Latin political tradition (as found for example in Hardt and Negri's *Empire*) still speaks the words *autonomy* and *production* together. As it happened often to environmentalism, the energetic narrative starts to function as a replacement and diversion of social conflicts. Despite the excitement of radical intelligentsia around this trend, the focus on energy seems to fall again into a sort of fatalism of a global superstructure impossible to grasp and confront.

What critical response is offered from the radical intelligentsia apart from fatalism and asceticism? Perhaps the 'psychopathology of everyday life' should finally be applied to cultural, intellectual and academic discourse itself. What happens, for instance, if Slavoj Žižek's thought has to confront the same kind of meta-linguistic psychoanalysis that he so readily applies to the Western cultural code? Žižek can be taken here as exemplary of a reassuring postmodernist discourse that exasperates the psycholinguistic critique of everything from politics to economy precisely in order to say: 'the "evil" is in the symbolic Code.' Just as Lacan once described the unconscious as structured like a language, so Žižek applies an equivocal understanding to the global imaginary; considering the 'collective unconscious' as a language that then projects any negative and contradictory tension onto the plane of *grammar*. The immediate *psychopolitical* consequence of this position is a *code claustrophobia* that disallows any potential engagement – an atmosphere quite common to many university departments, but one that simplifies managing the ongoing economy of bibliographies and references. Following Mark Dery's investigation of the grotesque of American popular culture in *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium*, a similar analysis is needed for contem-

porary radical thought: besides, Ballard reminds us, psychopathologies are potentially a good thing.

To return to the initial question: what can be the response to the *global civil warming* apart from language games and energy fatalism? This is not a case of protecting a supposed radical orthodoxy, but identifying the material forces and social subjects behind contemporary spirits (here, for example, postmodernists would say that desires and social subjects are always a construction, merely an ideological effect, and that: *we do not desire, but we believe to desire,* precisely through such ideological constructs and so on in a vicious circle). What are the real passions behind the psychopathologies of the Code? What are the healthy psychopathologies against the passions of the Empire? The two forces of this confrontation are obfuscated by a passionless thought preoccupied with language games. Far from London and the 'creative' capitals, new political passions are alive in the interstices of the Empire, while 'the suburbs dream of violence'.

Institute of Contemporary Boredom: The Art World as Symptom

Like radical theorists, many artists are concerned with forging a new politically engaged art by desperately pushing novel ideas into decaying nineteenth-century formats. Rather than drastically forcing the artistic practice towards political action, however, it might be more interesting and *radical* to conceptualize art itself as a social symptom. After all, what gesture is more political than setting the entire art world in context, instead of focusing on the desperate efforts of a single practitioner or work? No iconoclasm or naïve anti-aesthetic statements are necessary: Neoism and the season of *art strikes* are gone. It's time for a surgical inspection of the art world unconscious as the surface of broader social instincts, reversing the 'semiotic imperialism' of symptoms à la Žižek.

Today, the *social* coordinates of art need to be radically rethought. At the start of the twenty-first century, any avant-garde utopia based on the 'creativity to the masses' has been completely surpassed. Going beyond Benjamin's 'work of art in the age of its mechanical reproduction', society welcomes now the 'artists in the age of their social reproducibility'. An entropy of meaning affects art along with advertising and commodities; however, when energy leaves traditional formats, it surfaces elsewhere in unpredictable ways. The aesthetic impulse today belongs

more to a dark mediascape than to the white cube, as social creativity has been massively secularized and neutralized by creative industries and institutional cultural policies. When examined from the outside, the merger between art world and culture industry offers a harmless exhibition calmly packaged beneath the dark clouds of Empire, while obscure and powerful forces are surfacing readily on the digital screens of everyday life.

Questioning 'artistic resistance after the end of history', in their book *Cultural Activism Today*, the Dutch research collective BAVO provides a precise political account of the current art scene, even if couched in some dubious conclusions.[4] Essentially, following a typical postmodern logic, they claim that politically engaged art is the victim of a double bind: it is asked to be critical without directly questioning the dominant system, but as soon as 'critical art' becomes engaged, it is accused of not being 'critical' at all. Here, BAVO advances a strategy of *over-identification* as the only possible exit from 'the safe haven of art' and 'society's pathetic demand for small creative acts'. Instead of incarnating a predictable *anti*-position, this concept of over-identification works to imitate the language and imaginary of the dominant force in a hyper-realistic mimesis that, therefore, does not leave any room for a conventional reply.

BAVO, on one side, measures the boundaries of contemporary 'engaged' art and frames it under the effective label 'NGO art' – art that embraces and aestheticizes social injustice, but with a fetish for victimization that functions to sanitize any real political issues ('no politics please, victims only').

> 'Art Without Borders'. With such humanitarian organisations, these art practices share the idea that, considering the many urgent needs at hand, there is no call for high art statements, big political manifestoes or sublime expressions of moral indignation. Instead what are needed are direct, concrete, artistic interventions that help disadvantaged populations and communities to deal with the problems they are facing.[5]

On the other side, celebrated art world figures such as Santiago Sierra are, according to BAVO, the personification of the cynical artist, whose

provocations function to endorse a neoliberal consensus.[6] In cata-
logues, for instance, Sierra is advertised as highlighting socioeconomic
inequality through performances and installations, but as BAVO notes:
'Like a true capitalist, Sierra simply sat down, did nothing, took some
photographs and consumed the surplus value that was generated at
the expense of the day labourers.'[7] This critique, moreover, resonates
with Belgian theorist Dieter Lesage's perspective on Rem Koolhaas's
architecture as an acritical *over-identification* with capitalism. Playing
between Prada and *radical pragmatism,* Koolhaas has contributed to the
popularization of neoliberalism and market-orientated thought among
the European left, which has now elevated him to something of an icon,
Lesage observes in the same book.[8]

Between these twin poles of politically correct NGO art and the *art
of provocation*, BAVO advances the strategy of over-identification as the
only escape. This strategy has been utilized by the Slovenian avant-
garde groups Laibach and Neue Slowenische Kunst (defined more
precisely as a *retro-avantgarde*[9]) and conceptualized by Žižek himself in
his essay 'Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?'[10] Laibach artists are
famous for their ironic 'celebration' of the new world order in a kitsch
totalitarian aesthetics. Over-identification with the dominant code can
also be ascribed to other '90s' projects like Luther Blissett and, more re-
cently, the Yes Men (the latter is the only successful example that BAVO
offers in the age of globalization).[11] For a certain perspective, their exit
strategy from the claustrophobic realm of radical critique and 'engaged
art' embraces a very Lacanian solution: a *linguistic* critique of ideology
(that means taking ideology first and foremost as a *language*).

The overarching suspicion is that Lacan and Žižek make the disease
worst, trapping frustration in an even more oppressive matrix. The dia-
gram traced by BAVO may paradoxically repeat the dominant language
and feature no real hacks at all. The second step is constantly missing:
once the ideological tricks are recognized and turned upside down
through over-identification, what is the critique of the economic model
sustaining the culture industries themselves? Where are the real forces
driving over-identification? Sabotage of the dominant code is effective
only when it gains material outcomes. On 3 December 2004, the twen-
tieth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, a mediatic performance by the
Yes Men against Dow Chemical produced reported stock losses of

$2-billion on the Frankfurt exchange in just a few hours (TV news reported a false interview promising an investment of 12 billion dollars in medical care in the Bhopal region).[12]

The entropic loop of contemporary art practice is the fate of any discipline still trapped in the remnants of the previous Fordist regime. Indeed, transformations in the mode of production have complicated and extended classical distinctions between Labour, Politics and Intellect. As Paolo Virno observes in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, following Hannah Arendt, these categories have broken apart, but their residual force is still alive and kicking across many institutions and disciplines.

> The boundaries between pure intellectual activity, political action, and labor have dissolved. I will maintain, in particular, that the world of so called post-Fordist labor has absorbed into itself many of the typical characteristics of political action; and that this fusion between Politics and Labor constitutes a decisive physiognomic trait of the contemporary multitude.[13]

Paraphrasing Virno, we might say that new forms of production based on knowledge and communication (variously termed *knowledge economy*, *cognitive capitalism*, *network society*, etcetera) have hybridized and integrated labour, politics and art into a single unified gesture. Today, in order to work, do politics or create, one needs multiple competences. Accordingly, just as political skills are drawn together by production, aesthetic or artistic capacities are likewise subsumed through labour.

> In fact, political action now seems, in a disastrous way, like some superfluous duplication of the experience of labor, since the latter experience, even if in a deformed and despotic manner, has subsumed into itself certain structural characteristics of political action. . . . The inclusion of certain structural features of political praxis in contemporary production helps us to understand why the post-Ford multitude might be seen, today, as a *de-politicized* multitude. There is already too much politics in the world of wage labor (*in as much as it is* wage labor) in order for politics as such to continue to enjoy an autonomous dignity.[14]

Like politics, the role of art has been emptied of significance; spectacular society and contemporary productive forces are already far more aesthetic, desiring and iconoclast rather than any artistic statement. The creative imagination migrated from the white cube to the mediascape long ago: first by the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, then through post-War mass culture, the '60s' counter-culture and '70s' subcultural movements like punk. There is, as a result, more *politics* (in the sense of collective action) and *art* (in the sense of aesthetic gesture) in the sphere of production than any institution, political party or museum. Rather than perpetuating an implosive conceptual analysis of art objects, escaping from this dilemma involves moving *outside* the institutional sphere of art to perform a political critique of desiring capitalism, creative industries and the collective imaginary.

Virno provides a reverse understanding of the trend towards over-identification seducing the art world in all its conservative and progressive variants. While post-Fordism was largely established through key technological developments, this shift also involved the absorption of innovative and revolutionary tendencies originally developed through social movements – the 'refusal of work', the independent media, the various new lifestyles of the counterculture. In other words, the transition worked through co-opting the '*general intellect* of the multitude'. In this sense, according to Virno, post-Fordism 'incorporated, and rewrote in its own way, some aspects of the socialist experience' – the liberation of labour time, the crisis of the nation-state, the fetishization of difference, and so on. Post-Fordism finally realized the 'communism of capital'.

> The metamorphosis of social systems in the West, during the 1980s and 1990s, can be synthesized in a more pertinent manner with the expression: *communism of capital*. This means that the capitalistic initiative orchestrates for its own benefit precisely those material and cultural conditions which would guarantee a calm version of realism for the potential communism.[15]

This interpretation of post-Fordism represents the external twin to the internal over-identification with neoliberalism courted by theoretical discourse and art practice. From this perspective, when the 'commu-

nism of capital' explicitly feeds on collective imaginary, tactical over-identification on the contrary appears not to open any escape strategy from that level. The central difference between a post-Operaist and a postmodern approach lies precisely in the conception of language: for Virno, language has become a means of *production*; for Žižek, language repeats the *symbolic order* of the dominant ideology. That is, once again, the ancient struggle between demons of *production* and angels of *representation*.

Radically Correct: the Unconscious Puritanism of Activism

If both critical theory and art abide by the preceding formats of Fordism (ideology and the art object, respectively), contemporary activism is no different. The post-Seattle global movements and social forums were initially welcomed as an instance of horizontal democracy against the vertical structures of old political parties and major corporations, but gradually, a *representative* model was reintroduced that led to NGO-like world summits politely supported by a select group of social-democratic nations. These forums did not develop any new kind of agency apart from the *representation* of their dissent. In an insightful article on global cities and global movements, Dieter Lesage criticizes the 'militant tourism' of following spectacular events in trendy resorts (such as the G8 in Heligendamm), instead of doing what an anti-globalist movement is supposed to do: targeting *global capital* in its *global cities*.

> If anti-globalists are courageous enough to try and surround an airfield in order to prevent heads of state and government to physically reach their hotel in Heiligendamm . . . why then don't they try to surround the stock exchange in order to prevent the traders from doing their work? Anti-globalists have no business in Heligendamm. It's Frankfurt, stupid![16]

Apart from a good beginning with the Carnival Against Capitalism on 18 June 1999 in London and other cities when banks and stock exchanges were directly targeted, the alternative globalization movements have never had a clear idea about the real *productive* infrastructure of finance capital.[17] So it's no surprise they became unappealing – as Virno may say, there's more *activism* and *imagination* in the new forms of produc-

tion to consider such *representative* movements an attractive alternative. The psychological equilibrium of these organized forms of the 'multitude' is guaranteed by a longstanding 'art of complaining' against the evil of the Empire, a mentality rarely followed up by cutting-edge analysis. Global activists are still lacking a decent economic theory. The figure of Noam Chomsky, for instance, is emblematic of an *anarchism without an economic model.* Interestingly, in more recent work introduced in the next pages, Virno takes Chomsky himself as a paladin of the candid belief in the 'natural goodness' of humankind; an inclination supposedly constantly repressed by the evil of the Empire. Here, a curious convergence takes place: a puritan position on 'natural goodness' merges with the absence of an economic diagram. Surplus-value and libidinal surplus are expunged together from the horizon of global activism.

A paranoid and reactive conception of power can affect any school of thought or political movement. This is apparent also in the abuse of the term 'biopolitics' by scholars to denounce constantly omnipresent concretions of power: from the passé and harmless *dispositif* of art to the culture industry as a malignant mega-apparatus. A paranoid account of power can indeed conceal a deeper *anti-surplus* mentality and an unconscious puritanism. Indulging in a seductive genealogy of the political imaginary, it might not be so unreasonable to suspect a link between the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of Anglo-Saxon activism, comparable to Max Weber's influential argument of a link between religious asceticism and the rise of capitalism. There is a characteristic Anglo-Protestant inclination towards puritanism, just as there is a Latin-Catholic obsession for mythologies and body discipline. A *radically correct* position – similar to the politically correct stance of liberal discourse – seems, therefore, constantly at work within activism (subscribing, for instance, a puritan agenda to a diverse range of concerns, from deep ecology to anti-pornography, etcetera). This schema of militant puritanism is comparable to Deleuze and Guattari's account of fascist *subconscious* investments in the revolutionary *conscious* attitudes of the left-wing groups in the French '68 movement.[18] Such anti-surplus forms of activism can be seen paradoxically as attempts to remove the *animal body* from the human, while in actuality, a sophisticated biopolitical economy has become functionally installed right across the very flesh of that body.

The Removal of the Animal Body and the New Commons

> You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its function, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable.
> Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*

The removal of the 'animal body' is a preliminary hypothesis to sound across the contemporary cultural landscape, particularly in order to examine how the *animal spirits* of economy resurface in other forms behind the mediascape and the new factories of cultural production. The question of the animal side of human nature is to be considered, therefore, as a critical node of both radical culture and dominant discourse: the animal body manifests today its instinctive forces across technological fetishism as well as digital alienation, its politics crosses peace activism as well as anti-pornography crusades. The concept of *animal spirits* supplies the missing ground of the three idle loops of theory, art and activism, even if, however, the notion does not embrace a idealist conception of the 'good state of nature'. On the contrary, it acknowledges the ambivalent and conflictive instincts of humankind as Virno suggests in the next section, and consequently, it discloses the *biomorphic unconscious* of immaterial and cultural production – the physiology of surplus and excess energies flowing under any technological environment, the instinctual and 'irrational' forces also running behind the new cognitive and libidinal modes of capitalist accumulation. The animal body is the *productive engine* of the multitudes finally described in all its variants: cognitive, affective, libidinal and physical. It is a way to combine surplus production, social conflicts, libidinal excess and political passions along a single terrain.

In a general sense, the animal body is another name for living labour; the social body feeding the parasitic economy of advanced capitalism, the sexualized unconscious of mass media and cultural production, but also the dark side of the neo-conservative multitude. While intellectual discourse remains blind to the beast, capitalism siphons money right out of it and the Empire converts the animal energy into the force of its *imperial guard*. Just as Deleuze and Guattari rewrote the paranoid 'society of the spectacle' according to its schizophrenic nature, today a new

Dialectic of Enlightenment is needed to illuminate the shadows of cultural 'progress' and radical thought. The unconscious of technology, culture industries and the media imaginary needs to be re-conceptualized. This investigation of the negative (as the affirmative forces of natural drives are sometimes paradoxically described) is presented here in the conceptual figures of a minor bestiary: the bicephalous eagle of power and desire surfacing in the mediascape of the everyday, the parasite of network commons and digital production, the conflictive hydra of language and culture industries running loose in the economy of the metropolis.

The diagram of the animal spirits is the reverse of biopower: all the political and economic forces originate from below. Posthuman or cyborgian visions are not subscribed to here. It is no longer necessary to *imitate life through technology* to become familiar with the new mediascape and domesticate new devices: technology is already *biomorphic*. A new cultural sensibility, on the contrary, would attempt to name and ground the life behind technology (again under the dark clouds of energetic apocalypse), to map the common matter behind digital networks, cultural industries and the collective imaginary. The spirits of the multitude are not peaceful. If a conceptualization of animal spirits is crucial, then it is primarily a consequence of the dominant and abstract discourse around the new commons. The success of Creative Commons, Free Software, Wikipedia and other web platforms for knowledge sharing is apparent to everyone. But at the same time, the consciousness of the everyday 'free labour' of web users exploited by new media corporations is rising, or to use the expression popularized by post-Operaismo theory, the exploitation of the 'general intellect of the multitude'. It is, however, precisely these more ambivalent aspects of collective intelligence that are at stake: how those shadows are enmeshed with productive forces and state apparatuses, how *culture* and *intellect* are more instinctual embodiments than cognitive gestures.

Autonomous Marxism prefers to use the notion of 'the common' instead of commons, the later being a historically English concept, strictly tied to the life and economy of a rural community (where it had a more organic and pragmatic meaning). As a joke, the original definition of commons might be said to have included the animal, while the contemporary notion of 'creative commons' places emphasis solely on the immaterial or the *de-animalized*. Significantly, the common (or *commons*)

is only constituted through labour, pain, risk, waste and conflict: for instance with the rise of the 'immaterial commons' in the West supported by the computers assembled and discarded in the Third World. From a political and libidinal perspective, animal spirits have been awoken by this highly abstract and frustrating notion of the common developed in relation to the digital networks. An accurate understanding of the common must be always interlinked with the real physical forces producing it and the material economy surrounding it. These residual forces from a prior *biological stage* resurface for not being deeply 'civilized' by the *digital evolution*.

Just as social antagonisms previously restrained by a more solid or stable economy are unleashed through economic crisis, new *animal spirits* are set free by the recession of cognitive capitalism and by the energy crisis, but additionally, by the failure of the radical thought too. An abstract and friction-less notion of the commons is taken as a general paradigm for any sort of political agency. Reclaiming the obscure reality of the commons means recovering the productive animal force before its turns into the dark matter of capitalism, or even of a new fascism. Democracy should, therefore, be replaced by *demoncracy*, by a politics affirming the ambivalence of natural instincts to govern the common.

The Dark Side of the Multitude

> In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics.
> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*[1]

The Animal Open to the World

In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Virno's influential book that instigated an international debate, post-Fordism was understood through the predominant role of knowledge and communication in the Western economy. A second translated collection, *Multitude between Innovation and Negation*, on the other hand, marks an additional step: the core of language and cultural production itself is cast as an extension of the (self-destructive) instincts of the human being. These essays, in many ways, represent a follow-up to the modern debate around the state of nature, but with a dystopian and futuristic spin pertinent to a world saturated by machines and digital devices. Coming from different cultural latitudes, *network* and *multitude* have met each other as key concepts of the political thought of the twenty-first century. Here, the issue of the 'evil' dimension of the multitude not only affects the new political institutions, but in particular, also the new forms of production that are regularly separated out into immaterial and digital domains. In Virno's innovative account, general intellect and immaterial production begin to reveal their biomorphic fabric.

> There is no objective investigation of human nature that does not carry with it, like a clandestine traveller, at least the trace of a theory of political institutions. . . . And vice versa: there is no theory of political institutions worthy of its name that does not assume, as its ill-concealed supposition, one or the other of the representation of the traits that distinguish *Homo sapiens* from other animal species.[2]

With these words, Virno forces today's radical thought to put again the question of *human nature* and in particular of *evil nature* at the centre of political grammar. In an unexpected way, Virno stages an uncanny intervention into a political debate founded on the reassuring rhetoric of

the multitude and its digital companions. Rather than the progressive destiny of networks, commons and collective knowledge, an ambivalent and unruly *animal nature* is positioned as the kernel of the political discourse – the ground traditionally removed from both liberal and so-called radical thought.

Virno (like Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben and other contemporary philosophers) draws from the conservative thought of Carl Schmitt, to demonstrate how the issue of 'evil' is rendered across the political spectrum. Schmitt declared in 1932, from a Nazi perspective, that: 'Radicalism vis-à-vis state and government grows in proportion to the radical belief in the goodness of man's nature.'[3] On the other side of the political spectrum, Noam Chomsky is taken by Virno as the prime example of this belief in the 'natural goodness' of humanity, one that is supposed to be constantly repressed by state apparatuses.

> If man were a meek animal, dedicated to mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition, there would be no need whatsoever for disciplinary and coercive institutions. The criticism of the State, developed with various intensity by liberals, anarchists, and communists, is nourished, according to Schmitt, by the prejudicial idea of a 'natural goodness' in our species. An authoritative example of this tendency is established, today, by the libertarian political positions of Noam Chomsky. He supports, with admirable tenacity, the dissolution of the central apparatus of power, accusing this apparatus of humiliating the inborn creativity of verbal language, that is, the species-specific requirement capable of guaranteeing to the human community a self-government free of consolidated hierarchies.[4]

In his critique of victimism and the one-dimensional forms of left-wing political positions, Virno also confronts Freud's conservative anthropology. According to the Freudian 'psychological' critique of communism, the abolition of private property will never remove the root of the problem due to an aggressiveness innate to human beings: *homo homini lupus*, the Latin saying goes, 'man is a wolf to man'.

> The communists believe that they have found the path to deliverance from our evils. According to them, man is wholly good and is

well-disposed to his neighbor; but the institution of private prop-
erty has corrupted his nature. . . . In abolishing private property we
deprive the human love of aggression of one of its instruments, cer-
tainly a strong one, though certainly not the strongest; but we have
in no way altered the differences in power and influence which are
misused by aggressiveness, nor have altered anything in its nature.[5]

Freud's critique could be turned upside down, however, if the *abolition of
private property* is replaced by an affirmative *production of the common,* as
will become clearer in the following chapters. In any case, by balancing
Freud and Schmitt against Chomsky, Virno attempts a Copernican turn
at the centre of contemporary radical thought. Between the authori-
tarian repression of 'evil' and the liberal belief in 'goodness', only an
acknowledgement of the dark side of the multitude can establish a true
'radicalism' against state and capitalism.

'Hostile radicalism towards the state' and towards the capitalist
means of production, far from taking for granted the innate meek-
ness of our species, can construct its own authentic pedestal in full
recognition of the 'problematic' temperament of the human animal,
which is undefined and potential (thus also dangerous). The criti-
cism of the 'monopoly of political decision making' and, in general,
of institutions whose rules function as a compulsion to repeat, must
stand firmly upon the determination that man is 'evil by nature'.[6]

Virno develops his equally tragic yet affirmative vision – his *optimism
of the nerves* against the *pessimism of the senses* – inspired by the count-
less examples of this innate civil conflict within humankind. Man is an
'animal open to the world' (as Heidegger reminds), and is curious and
creative as a result, but also disoriented and *conflictive.* The struggle for
prestige and honour in any field, Virno remarks, is an expression of the
instinctual nature of humanity (introduced as *immaterial civil war* in the
following chapters).

In a second crucial turn, Virno defines the sphere of culture itself
– that is Enlightenment and all the modern celebratory conceptions of
creativity – as an extension of natural aggressiveness. What is supposed
to protect the human from its own instincts can have the opposite ef-

fect and amplify them. Indeed: the greater the spirit, the greater the beast. The relation between rationality and civilization is, of course, never as linear as expected. In particular, the malicious *liaison* between rationality and totalitarianism is clearly evidenced by the twentieth-century concentration camps.

> However, it is precisely culture, as an innate biological device, that exhibits substantial ambivalence: it smoothes out danger; but in other instances, it multiplies and diversifies the occasions of risks . . . And yet, since it is itself the very manifestation of this plasticity and indecision, culture favors at one and the same time the full deployment of that nature against which it should offer defense.[7]

This is an inverted and more sinister version of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* The culture industry might not simply involve a 'regression of enlightenment to ideology', as Adorno and Horkheimer observed,[8] but on the contrary, it might constitute an ongoing extension of the *animal spirit* of the human: 'Language, far from mitigating intraspecies aggression (as Habermas and a certain number of happy-go-lucky philosophers assure us), radicalizes this aggression beyond measure.'[9]

Interestingly, for Virno innovation is directly tied to an innate human aggressiveness. At the level of base energies, aggressiveness, innovation and revolution all share the same wellspring – the same obscure source that feeds state power as well. This is an intriguing and uncanny hypothesis compared to the usual flat celebration of the 'creative economy' and 'creative cities'.

> The dangerousness of our species is as extensive as its capacity to execute innovative actions; that is to say, innovative actions capable of modifying customs and consolidated norms. Whether one speaks of excessive drive, of linguistic negation, of a 'separation' from one's own vital context, or of the modality of the possible, it is abundantly evident that we are speaking, only in one fell swoop, of the premises of the abuse of power and of torture. We speak in a similar manner of the requirements that allow for the invention of works councils or of other democratic organisms based on that typically political passion that is *friendship without familiarity*.[10]

After various simplistic and theoretically unsound interpretations of immaterial labour and general intellect, especially within Anglo-American academia, Virno finally provides a disenchanted dimension for those concepts. Collective intelligence is the ambivalent exoskeleton of the species: at once the basis for *institutions of the common* and an extension of humanity's inborn aggressiveness. Virno advances the picture of what may be called a *bicephalous* nature of politics, where the biological evil is part of the institutional good, where *logos* travels always with its own peculiar *hubris*. Biopolitics resounds here as a darker *zoopolitics*: not the power over the *bios*, but the *zoe* behind politics itself. An *energetics* takes the place of aesthetics (to use a language dear to Nietzsche and Deleuze's materialism). Virno, however, prefers to cite the 'murmurings in the desert' to describe the 'internal conflicts' of the multitude: during the Jewish exodus 'the bond of solidarity weakens: nostalgia for the ancient oppression grows, respect for their fellow escapees suddenly changes into hatred, and violence and idolatry overflow'.

Virno's position is positively dystopian. To be effective, 'radicalism' has to govern the bind between risk and innovation, violence and revolution, evil and consciousness. Abdicating this responsibility means leaving the field in the hands of authoritarian forces. In an accurate assessment, Virno recognizes both Chomskian and poststructuralist approaches as being responsible for having erased the memory of the '(self)destructive drives of the linguistic animal'.

> Contemporary critical thought – from Chomsky to French poststructuralism – has attempted to overcome the dialectical schema according to which the (self)destructive drives of the linguistic animal would be destined to strengthen and perfect, again and again, the synthesis of the State. This school of thought has found it convenient to expunge from its own horizon, together with the dialectic, even the very memory of those (self)destructive drives. In this way, contemporary critical thought runs the risk of corroborating Schimitt's diagnosis: 'Radicalism hostile toward the State grows in equal measure with faith in the radical goodness of human nature.'[11]

This approach has brought contemporary political thought to an impasse. In response, Virno proposes that 'rather than repealing the negative, even

in order to escape from the dialectical millstone, it is necessary to develop a nondialectical understanding of the negative'.[12] An anti-idealistic understanding of human nature would frame the *negative* in the form of 'ambivalence, oscillation, perturbing' rather than negation.[13] However, what Virno describes as the *ambivalence* of the human animal should be strongly and more accurately affirmed as a clear *asymmetry* of forces. Any ambivalence eventually leaves its nebulous state and turns into a precise concretion, it takes a precise direction. Ambivalence is not for long.

After the crisis of the modern state and 'monopoly of political decision' due to the emergent knowledge-based economy and new social movements, Virno asks which new institutions can be imagined outside the State-form. How is it possible to turn the 'excessive drive' into an antidote against itself, into an affirmative force?[14] The problem of an antidote to inoculate the multitude is not considered by the libertarians and undercover puritans of *radicalism*, they are not concerned with the 'risky problematic nature of the human animal'.[15] On the contrary, Virno declares the 'impossibility of leaving the natural state': culture and politics cannot be separated from instinctual drives. If previously Virno recognized the multitude as the political subject in antagonism towards the one-dimensional notion of 'people', here the multitude surfaces as an ambivalent and controversial form: a demoncracy against a democracy.

> The *multitude*, defamed by Hobbes, who judged it to be a mere regurgitation of the state of nature within the civil state, this *multitude* constitutes, today, the fundamental form of political existence. It is no longer an incidental parenthesis, but a stable way of being. In an era when the modern State is waning, and the 'monopoly of political decision making' is falling to pieces, it happens that in every aspect of social organization a plurality of individuals prone to avoid (and even, at times, to obstruct) the circuits of representative democracy becomes ever more valid. This is a plurality that at times is aggressive, and at times united, but never reducible to the concept of the 'people', a people that, according to Hobbes, 'is somewhat that is *one*, having one will' (Hobbes, *Citizen*). Sometimes aggressive, sometimes united, prone to intelligent cooperation, but also to the war between factions, being both the poison and the antidote: such is the multitude.[16]

Compared with previous elaborations, the multitude here reveals a sort of biomorphic unconscious, traversed by a manifest and latent contents, formed simultaneously by natural drives and civilized language. In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Virno attempted to unify this social category through the notion of *general intellect* originally inherited from Marx but re-imagined as the basis for the 'institutions of the multitude' (all the autonomous forms of organization, from the workers' council of the industrial age to today's networks).[17] If Virno is still fond of this version of collective intelligence as a unifying foundation, it is only in terms of the more ambivalent conception of the *katechon*.

> This Greek word, used by the apostle Paul in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians and then constantly referred to in conservative doctrine, means 'that which restrains' – a force that defers, over and over again, total destruction. It seems to me that the concept of *katechon*, with the political implication of ritual practices, contributes significantly in defining the structure and the duties of institutions that no longer pertain to the state. The idea of a force that restrains so-called 'evil', without the possibility of expelling this evil . . . falls within the framework of the antimopolistic politics of the exodus.[18]

As Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito explains in *Immunitas*, the *katechon* 'restrains evil by containing it, maintaining it, detaining it within itself . . . hosting it and welcoming it to the point of binding to its very presence its very necessity'.[19] To what extent can the *katechon* be described as an imitation of the bicephalous eagle of power, the force that simultaneously watches and holds the sky and earth, both freedom and repression? Could a molecular model of *katechon* be embraced as a route through postmodern pessimism, puritan radicalism and the flows of network capitalism? Can the *katechon* descend into the recesses of anthropology and become the 'just masochism' of desire capable of counterpowering the spectacular society?

By advancing a model for the 'institutions of the multitude', Virno's conclusion is not triumphalist, especially in light of events like those following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans: the civil implosion suddenly transposed from social equilibrium. Virno finally declares the multitude a highly unstable animal, a conflictive hydra crossed both

by self-destructive instincts and forms of self-organization, *language as conflict* and *language as institution*, but articulated by a kind of postmodern undecidability between the two poles (somehow it remains unclear when and how this oscillation triggers forms of accumulation of surplus value and power).

> The contemporary multitude reflects within itself, quite apparently, the double ethical value of verbal language: the springing forth of danger and the force that restrains it, radical evil and apotropaic resource. The multitude, just like verbal language, is also a risky state of loss of equilibrium and a favorable restraint: murmurs in the desert and joint self-government, (self-)destruction and *katechon*. . . . The contemporary multitude, in the process of its exodus from state sovereignty, presents to the naked eye the connection between the two renowned Aristotelian definitions of *Homo sapiens*: linguistic animal and political animal.[20]

Accordingly, the contemporary multitude is a dangerous animal that manifests itself through a linguistic and political exoskeleton, but always as an unstable and temporary *katechon*.

What lessons can be learnt from Virno? First, the unconscious of culture and politics is rooted in the natural aggressiveness of man as an animal: 'Man is evil by nature.' Second, no radicalism can be established on the basis of a puritan belief in the inherent goodness of humanity: reassuring positions like Chomsky's give free reign to the dark side of the multitude and are impotent against any authoritarian turn. Third, culture and language, Enlightenment and new organized networks, far from resolving conflicts, can easily radicalize and exacerbate them. The 'creative economy' and Internet culture surface as an extension of both a biomorphic unconscious and a civilized intelligence. Fourth, the '(self)destructive drives of the linguistic animal' can be controlled and restrained only by the 'institutions of the multitude'. The *katechon* is the model of this bicephalous being that catches the manifest and latent content of power, that is able to detain its own poison as vaccine. Fifth, the *katechon* can also be the molecular diagram of a bicephalous ethics, as opposed to the rhetoric of desire; a *just masochism* positioned between radical puritanism and desiring capitalism. In conclusion, the ambiva-

lence of the multitude is something to be solved by itself. Animal spirits eventually tend towards one pole of the uncertainty. A decision is always to be made.

Virno provides a general structure for a bestiary of the contemporary political animals. A bestiary may represent a less dialectical and more *organic* genre to investigate the human animal. For instance, Virno's ambivalence of power and desire can be described by the supposedly paradoxical figure of a *bicephalous being* – historically, the bicephalous eagle of imperial power. In the same way, Virno's conflictive human nature surfaces in the culture industry as the *conflictive hydra* of immaterial labour. This minor bestiary will be extended later with another non-dialectical organism: the parasite, as conceptualized in the work of Michel Serres. Before that it is necessary to restore the role of the animal figure within the humanist tradition.

Restoration of a Bicephalous God

Virno's exploration of the underground of political institutions resonates with the conflicted relation ancient Gnosticism maintained towards the material world in which human souls were perceived as being trapped. In the early centuries of the absolute dominion of Christianity, Gnosticism represented a manifestation of heretic materialism, and developed an esoteric and elitist cult of knowledge against the faith of the Christian multitudes. Georges Bataille advanced the hypothesis of 'a sect of licentious Gnostics' devoted to sexual rites to fulfil an obscure demand for baseness: 'It is difficult to believe that on the whole Gnosticism does not manifest above all a sinister love of darkness, a monstrous taste for obscene and lawless *archontes*, for the head of the solar ass,' he says.[21] In the Gnostic cosmology, the *archons* were servants of the Demiurge (the 'creator god') appointed to govern the obscure force of the matter. Bataille continues:

> In practice, it is possible to see as a leitmotiv of Gnosticism the conception of matter as an active principle having its own eternal autonomous existence as darkness (which would not be simply the absence of light, but the monstrous *archontes* revealed by this absence), and as evil (which would not be the absence of good, but a creative action). This conception was perfectly incompatible with the very

principle of the profoundly monistic Hellenistic spirit, whose dominant tendency saw matter and evil as degradations of superior principles.[22]

The materialist cult of the animal-headed gods and, in particular, the figure of an acephalous being, is the underlying inspiration for Bataille's own *Acéphale*, a review journal published in 1936 ('Man has escaped from his head, as the condemned ma from prison,' reads the manifesto).[23] Surprisingly, the original *acephalous* deity, as Bataille himself reveals in his article 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism', was actually *bicephalous*, grasped by an unclear figure of an 'acephalic god beneath two animal heads', identified in the Egyptian god Bes (protector of households, mothers and children and later of the pleasure of life, music, dance and sex). As Agamben observes of Bataille and his initiates in his book *The Open*: 'The acephalous being glimpsed for an instant in their privileged experiences might have been neither human nor divine, but in no case could it be animal.' If Bataille's dark materialism goes further than Virno's ambivalent instincts, Agamben nevertheless identifies the missing subject of the animal at the root of Bataille's *philosophy of excess*. The bicephalous animal was beheaded by Bataille himself.

In *The Open*, Agamben tries to recombine the separated destinies of man and animal. He writes a history of the 'anthropological machine' of humanism as a history of the 'mystery of separation' [*mysterium disiunctionis*] between man and animal. The notion of human nature is always problematic, Agamben points out, since the term *life* has never been strictly defined in the Western tradition but 'ceaselessly articulated and divided', from the Old Testament to modern genetics.[24] In the end our separation from the divine or the *logos* is always invisibly determined on the contrary by our relation to the *inner* animal. The same lesson demonstrates how no vitalism can be thought without the animal.

> In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and politi-

cal mystery of separation. . . . And perhaps even the most luminous sphere of our relations with the divine depends, in some way, on that darker one which separates us from the animal.[25]

A theological apparatus was needed to clearly separate the soul from the *animal spirit* and establish the domain of god. Later, as Foucault reminds in *Will to Knowledge*, the introduction of the technique of confession by the Church also opened up the space of inner life and imagination to the intervention of power (a tradition continued under a secular guise by psychoanalysis in the twentieth century). In Agamben's biopolitics, the modern state apparatus began to focus their governance of populations on *bare life*, rather than on the more traditional fields of discipline and law. Biopower started to manage attentively the *animal life* of the body and mind (violent instincts, sexual drives, erotic fantasies), using the anthropogenic techniques inaugurated by religious power. After the eclipse of traditional forms of culture such as religion and ideology, Agamben states that the centrality of the government shifts directly to the 'animality of man' and its 'physiology'.

> Faced with this eclipse, the only task that still seems to retain some seriousness is the assumption of the burden – and the 'total management' – of biological life, that is of the very animality of man. Genome, global economy, and humanitarian ideology are the three united faces of this process in which posthistorical humanity seems to take on its own physiology as its last, impolitical mandate.[26]

In all the contemporary accounts of Foucault's biopolitics, the animal nature is kept apart from any political understanding or it is protected in the cage of animal rights. If contemporary biopolitical power is based on the *humanitarian* notion of man, Agamben reminds us that behind the man there is the religious and political problem of the *animal*: 'In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man.'[27] But is it really necessary to distinguish the *animal spirits* from the modern *biopolitical machine*? Agamben believes that it is better not to feed a further mythological machine (by replacing *humanism* with *animalism* for instance), but to suspend finally the animal-man separation.

However, it is not here a question of trying to trace the no longer human or animal contours of a new creation that would run the risk of being equally as mythological as the other. As we have seen, in our culture man has always been the result of a simultaneous division and articulation of the animal and the human, in which one of the two terms of the operation was also what was at stake in it. To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new – more effective of more authentic – articulations, but rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that – within man – separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man.[28]

Instead of celebrating the *animal spirits* in another *desiring revival*, it is more interesting to see how the figure of the animal has been used historically to condense those natural instincts that resist the matrix of ordinary power. Instead of establishing a further *animalism*, an animal mythology to condense frustrated and alienated energies (as the animal rights ideology often functions), it is more useful to investigate how natural instincts are part of the material basis of contemporary production, even in its more 'immaterial' and technology-based forms. The bicephalous archon beheaded by Bataille can be restored by suspending the separation of animal and man.

As the tragedy of Nazism shows, the 'reason' of biopolitics is made of the same dark matter it supposedly confronts and governs. More generally, the rationality of technocracy is not less animal than the instinctual drives of the masses it must manage. The well-known paradigm of biopolitics should be traced back to a *zoological* origin, rather than an a-biological notion of power. Biopolitics in Agamben continues a millenary process of articulating and separating *bios* until its modern techno-medical extensions. However, behind any organization of biopower, animal physiology always breathes and frets. Foucault inaugurated the notion of biopolitics focusing precisely on the constitution and control of Western sexuality. Rather than the state *apparatus of capture*, it is crucial to underline the autonomous and productive force of the *animal spirits*. The physiology and neurology of the human animal, its libidinal, emotional and psychopathological economy, has become a complex

battlefield in the age of so-called advanced capitalism. Similar to a medieval bestiary, the figure of the animal elucidates this condition. Perhaps it is time for twenty-first-century culture to adjust its debt with the animal nature as it happened once during the Renaissance, as Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization*:

> At the beginning of the Renaissance, the relations with animality are reversed; the beast is set free; it escapes the world of legend and moral illustration to acquire a fantastic nature of its own. And by an astonishing reversal, it is now the animal that will stalk man, capture him, and reveal him to his own truth. Impossible animals, issuing from a demented imagination, become the secret nature of man.[29]

A Conceptual Bestiary of the Commons

Control of space and cyberspace. Much as control of the high seas –
and the protection of international commerce – defined global pow-
ers in the past, so will control of the new 'international commons' be
a key to world power in the future. An America incapable of protect-
ing its interests or that of its allies in space or the 'infosphere' will
find it difficult to exert global political leadership.
'Project for the New American Century', 2000[1]

A Conceptual Bestiary

Considering the *spirit of the time* a decade after the turn of the millen-
nium, hysteria around energy resources has replaced the ghosts of war
and terrorism, spectres that on their own had already sunk the utopian
drives of network culture and the anti-globalization movement few
years before. After the *machinic* age and the domestication of the new
network biosphere, a conjuncture of events, from global warming to
peak oil and food price speculation, is forcing Western countries to
reconsider the ecological and biological premises of their wealth and
infrastructures. This pragmatic awakening dismisses both the techno-
enthusiasts and false prophets of further apocalypses: *after the machinic
excess, re-enter the living energy* – the same energy that, however, has
always been in the background providing the organic feed for those
machinic engines. Beyond the 'desiring flows' of Fordist factories and
the network expansion of digital post-Fordism, eventually finite energy
becomes the dystopia to confront. Following *de-industrialization*, there
comes a process of *de-energization* and austerity, politically supported
by 'green' activism under the ascetic motto 'consume less'. However,
as long as *downshifting* continues to advance a reactive lifestyle by not
directly questioning the present mode of production, the political role
of natural energies and animal forces will remain hidden. Contrary to
downshifting the concept of *animal spirits* is inspired by an unafraid or
positive vision of such a scenario. In Ballard's first and prophetic novel
The Drowned World (published in 1962), solar radiation has caused the
polar ice caps to melt and global temperatures to rise, leaving the cit-
ies of northern Europe and America submerged by tropical lagoons.
Rather than being disturbed by the end of the old world, however, the

protagonist is enraptured and stimulated by the nature that has arrived to replace it.

Instead of rendering the contemporary age with concepts still influenced by the technological environment or Enlightenment dialectics, the bestiaries of the Middle Ages can better assist with facing the uncanny animality unleashed through us. A basic bestiary of the *demoncracy* populating the contemporary multitude can be sketched starting from the ground energies introduced so far. The instinctual nature of the human animal described by Virno manifests itself in different forms. Its ambivalence initially emerges from the contradictory nature of desire, as a fetish for power, war and domination, and at the same time in the violent and pornographic features of the spectacular society. It appears as the *bicephalous eagle* of the Empire holding at the same time institutional and subversive forces, power and enjoyment, Leviathan and multitude. When natural instincts invade the sphere of collective language and culture, they become a sort of *immaterial civil conflict* within the multitude itself and may be illustrated by the figure of a *conflictive hydra*, whose heads scream and devour each other.

Relying on this notion of ambivalence and conflict might appear, however, as a form of postmodern relativism, where political decisions are ultimately indistinguishable from each other. On the contrary, such ambivalence is never balanced, but always asymmetrical: the arrow of surplus and energy moves in one direction, not both. The structure of power, production and accumulation of surplus-value is never binary, but ternary. Between knowledge economy and material economy, for instance, there is always a *parasite* exchanging energy and surplus in an unequal way, as Michel Serres would say. The supposed 'autonomy' of the new cultural and technological commons is paid by those who conduct the material work. The relations between biological, energetic, technological and cultural strata (to play with an extended materialism) are always inter-parasitic.[2] The autonomy of one segment from the others is not easy.

The bicephalous eagle of power and desire, the conflictive hydra of language and the parasite of the commons together constitute a basic bestiary for the age of neo-archaic capitalism, and can hopefully map a generation of *new political animals*, where the puritanical impulse does not suffocate the *animal spirit* for an easy dream of autonomy.

The Bicephalous Eagle: The Ambivalence of Power and Desire

Virno suggests that a proper *radicalism* cannot be grounded on a belief in the natural *goodness* of humankind or social movements; it cannot be indignant and scandalized by *evil*. On the contrary, it has to respond by taking the poison as its own antidote. The bicephalous figure that emerges finally captures and confronts the mystery of the *double-headed eagle* – the centuries old symbol of power. Since the Byzantine Empire, the bicephalous eagle has been the sign of reconciliation between matter and spirit, between the secular and religious world, at once watching east and west, heaven and earth. The double-headed eagle shows how power contains its opposite by definition: the source of its apparent *positive* institution is also the force of the *negative*, the 'evil' of the multitudes. The bicephalous eagle stands in front of Spinoza's and Reich's question: why do masses desire their oppression? It represents the public image of power and its dark side, which is the real source of its potency.

The inoculation of the *pharmakon* of evil into the multitude can be interpreted as a rupture of the post-Fordist paradigm; a development traditionally described by post-Operaismo as the mode of production based on language, knowledge and communication technologies. Post-structuralism, Operaismo and the momentum of '68 incited a rupture with the Fordist paradigm on the basis of an *autonomous* notion of production. Is it possible to consider today an epistemic break within the knowledge economy and network society along a dystopian understanding of (limited) desire and (limited) energy? Is it possible to move beyond the impasses of the postmodern and its *dialectical symmetries* that parcel out technology, new commons and the collective imaginary as separate or independent spheres?

Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of revolutionary investments (their notes in *Anti-Oedipus* on the unconscious fascism of some left-wing groups) was one of the first topologies of the ambivalence of the political desire. Accordingly, the strategies of over-identification described by BAVO are only possible because of this *ambivalence of desire* (before any *ambivalence of language* that Žižek may identify in the dominant code). The two-headed beast of desire in its composition of violent instincts and rational forces represents one of the core definitions of *animal spirits*, the biological and zoological ground of collective subjectivities.

According to this definition, the technological, economic and cultural sphere can be described as a *biomorphic extension* of natural aggressiveness. Virno's seminal contribution, therefore, not only concerns the ambivalent nature of the multitude, but additionally reveals the *biomorphic unconscious* of cultural production. Moving beyond Virno, the violent drives of human nature are clearly revealed today in the latent sexual content working behind the collective imaginary. The pornographic imaginary of war (from 911 voyeurism to the Abu Ghraib scandal, to find recent examples) illuminates how the instincts of species survival are rooted into the same ground of the reproductive impulse. War and politics, as embodiments of the species instinct, are then naturally traversed by a subterranean libido. War reveals the bicephalous nature of desire so that, as Ballard observes, 'far from repelling us, it appeals to us'.[3]

The Parasite of the Commons: Alliance and Sabotage

Virno criticizes the belief in a binary opposition between the 'goodness' of human nature and the 'evil' of the state apparatus. He notices how all political and cultural institutions simultaneously resolve, extend and amplify the conflictive instincts of the human species. However, this 'ambivalence' is not another binary opposition, but actually a consequence of deeply asymmetrical and contradictory forces. The ambivalence of nature is never symmetrical. The arrow of surplus-value and energy, desire and power, exploitation and accumulation always flows in one direction, forming a ternary vector. What puritan radicalism can also not tolerate is a ternary element that disturbs the harmony of its binary world.

Michel Serres captures the asymmetry of universal life in the conceptual figure of the *parasite*. Throughout his influential book *The Parasite*, Serres describes how the exchange of energy between organisms is never wholly equal, but always involves a parasite stealing energy and surplus from another organism.[4] From this premise, he builds an entirely new conception of economy and ecology, one that extends Virno's *biomorphism* in a more precise direction. If the *bicephalous eagle* is conceptually useful to frame as the foundation of political institutions, the parasite offers a molecular model for the asymmetries of economy and technology; in particular, as a critique of the recent utopia of digital commons and network cooperation. Serres extends Virno's vision by

describing the biological roots of economy, knowledge and technology down to the scale of microorganisms (avoiding any *naturalist* justification of capitalism). This shift is described as 'reverse anthropomorphism'. In Virno, if language and culture become an extension of the *aggressive* dimension of natural instincts, they are an invention and extension of the *parasitic* dimension of life in Serres. 'The parasite invents cybernetics,' Serres polemically concludes.

Serres shares the same vitalism of Bataille, but provides a punctual model to understand the asymmetrical relations between different strata of economy – the friction between material and immaterial, biologic and semiotic, economic and mediatic. The organic model of the parasite is embraced in the next chapter as the core concept of a new (*organic*) understanding of media ecologies. Indeed, prophetically, Serres introduces cybernetics (and its extension, the network) as a late manifestation of the parasitic food chain. What happens to the notion of multitude (intended as the self-organization of the *general intellect* into an antagonistic subject) in a similar scenario, when the parasite of intellectual labour enters the political arena? What happens to Free Culture, digital commons and peer-to-peer paradigms when the network infrastructure is represented as a vampiric tentacular creature? A sharp asymmetry must be reintroduced between the semiotic and the social, the technological and the biological, between the material and the immaterial.

The dystopian biomorphism of Serres inspires a healthy scepticism concerning the widespread celebration of the new digital commons as the space of a new political and economic autonomy. The *becoming-parasite* of capitalism is the emergent regime of speculation and rent, subverting the market by playing financial tricks on real estate, oil and food, but also on the infrastructures and the *new commons* of communication, cooperation and knowledge. The economy of *rent* is becoming the other side of the commons, the silent parasite exploiting the living labour of the multitude stored particularly in the free-access resource of the digital commons. However, describing the metabolism of the parasite additionally indicates the new coordinates of political action. The political models advanced in the last decades by the digital and network avant-gardes can be described as sort of *alliance with the parasite* rather than an example of true political autonomy. Serres similarly outlines the history of humanity as a never-ending alliance with parasites, since

they are not necessarily detrimental to human health. From the discovery of fermented food like bread and wine (thanks to microorganisms like yeast and bacteria) to the mysteries of the religious and bureaucratic caste (demanding and managing the surplus production of society), the alliance with the parasite is part of the foundation of the society and sometimes of its physical wellbeing. For instance, the relations between the network of Free Software developers and corporations such as IBM (adopting Free Software to sell more hardware) can be described only in the terms of a tactical alliance with a macroparasite.

The parasite may represent a kind of equilibrium with the host (as with the good guest microorganisms of our body) but also a form of radical exploitation and speculation (man himself is the main parasite of the resources of the natural kingdom!). However, the model of the parasite indicates the vector of a precise exchange of energy, and for this very reason, also the position of a potential sabotage of such an exchange. The parasite is another politically ambivalent diagram that shifts from a tactical alliance to a strategic sabotage. The sabotage of value accumulation over the new commons is today, in particular, the only political gesture of the multitudes that would be truly effective in defending the new commons against the anonymous and impersonal dimension of speculative rent.

The Hydra of Language: The Biomorphic Unconscious of Culture

When instinctual drives contaminate collective language and culture, they appear as a *conflictive hydra*, whose heads scream and devour each other in a material and immaterial 'civil' conflict that erupts from the multitude. Today's 'Free Culture' movement (from Free Software to Creative Commons to any artistic use of such metaphors) can be taken as an example of the belief in the 'natural goodness' of human beings and *networks*. 'Information is non-rival' is a popular saying among supporters of the Free Culture movement, from which the contours of a utopian non-competitive society are deduced and explained. On the contrary, examining the labour conditions of temporary workers, freelancers and activists demonstrates how competition and social distress are amplified through informational production.

The hydra of the *immaterial civil war* emerges when the economy of ideas is extended across the whole of society; it is linked to the phe-

nomenon of 'artists in the age of their social reproduction' and the entropic decay of collective intelligence. Immaterial conflict is the norm between intellectual workers, despite all the rhetoric of knowledge sharing and digital commons. It is manifested in the well-known rivalry within academia and the art world, to the economy of references, the race of deadlines, the competition for festival selection and between festivals themselves, the envious and suspicious attitudes among activists. Immaterial civil war is the constant struggle on the stage of the society of the spectacle: a cruel Ballardian jungle of brands, pop stars, gadgets, devices, but also formats and protocols. Immaterial exploitation is the everyday life of precarious workers, particularly of the younger generations, completely aware of the symbolic capital produced by their lives *put to work.* The notion of immaterial civil war describes the explosion of social relations enclosed in the modern commodity. As Italian economist Rullani points out, there is even more competition in the realm of the knowledge economy when reproducibility is free and speed becomes a crucial mark of difference. How can the constitution of the common be reconsidered in the context of a cognitive civil conflict? The 'composition' of *immaterial civil conflict* as a *material class conflict* in the form of the exploitation of cognitive capitalism is the political question at stake. Immaterial civil war challenges the composition of new social subjects, from the *cognitariat* to the 'creative class'. Only a productive definition of the common can decipher the profile of the new subjectivities. In the mirror of immaterial civil war, there comes the production of the common.

Another important step in a new theory of the commons is a materialistic map of their typologies, as the discourse around the commons suffers especially from a large dose of abstraction and rhetoric. *A geology of media* and *biology of culture* is required to finally free the immaterial means of production from useless abstractions. The environment of the new commons can be described along three coordinates, inspired by the new materialism of Manuel DeLanda developed in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* and by his original source of inspiration, that *geologism of strata* introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus.*[5] These three coordinates are: *strata, commons,* and *frictions.* Deleuze and Guattari defined strata in this way:

The strata are phenomena of thickening of the Body of the earth, simultaneously molecular and molar: accumulations, coagulations, sedimentations, foldings. They are Belts, Pincers, or Articulations. Summarily and traditionally, we distinguish three major strata: psychochemical, organic, and anthropomorphic . . . . The strata are extremely mobile. One stratum is always capable of serving as the *substratum* of another, or of colliding with another, independently of any revolutionary order. Above all, between two strata or between two stratic divisions, there are *interstratic* phenomena: transcodings and passages between milieus, intermixings. . . . What movement, what impulse, sweeps us outside the strata (*metastrata*)? Of course, there is no reason to think that all matter is confined to the physicochemical strata: there exists a submolecular, unformed Matter. Similarly, not all Life is confined to the organic strata: rather, the organism is that which life sets against itself in order to limit itself, and there is a life all the more intense, all the more powerful for being anorganic. There are also nonhuman Becomings of human beings that overspill the anthropomorphic strata in all directions.[6]

Strata. Strata are the different matters that constitute the commons. From the most material to the most immaterial, the habitat of human civilization can be described in a schematic geology composed by energetic, biological, technological, linguistic, mythological strata. The biomorphic intuition is not a metaphor, but simply the diagram of a living matter that can be tracked from geological formations to urban structures, following DeLanda's influential conceptualization. Biomorphic is the way to describe a city according to its economy of energy flows and biomass: like an organism, but without an obsession for totality. Biomorphic is also the collective unconscious of the mediascape when it reveals its stark violent subtext and libidinal economy. Each stratum has represented and supported different historical periods, alternate political and economic models, including typologies of commons (from the agricultural society to the industrial revolution to the present cognitive capitalism).

Commons. Each stratification is a 'natural' resource. To temporarily set aside the history of capitalism as a force of privatization, the focus here is on the status of the so-called new commons. If the traditional

definition of commons refers to the production of organic energy and biomass across a material segment of land, the use of the term 'commons' to conceptualize immaterial strata is metaphorical and problematic. While alternate forms of the 'immaterial commons' have already been mapped by different concepts throughout the history of thought – Marx's *general intellect*, Harvey's *collective symbolic capital,* Bourdieu's *cultural capital*, and the well-known *creative commons* and *digital commons* – a new topology is required to unify such a diverse family.

Frictions. Between different strata and commons, there are asymmetrical phenomena or transfers. Faith in the 'natural goodness' of the commons believes in a friction-free system, where each stratum can grow autonomously and positively influence the others: namely, knowledge sharing and network cooperation will eventually bring about the cooperation and sharing of goods in material contexts. However, as theories of cognitive capitalism have shown, the nature of the common is quite ambivalent, it may be easily exploited through rent. Structural friction always entails an exchange, accumulation or dissipation of energy, in particular of surplus-value. This asymmetry is the coordinate of profit, rent and speculation, but also the coordinate of political resistance and sabotage. The stratification of matter and human activity is crossed by a living energy that is constantly accumulated, parasitized and sabotaged along asymmetrical forms and frictions. The history of the common is the history of a surplus of living energy. The biomorphic unconscious of cultural commons and digital networks is still fundamentally the law of energy.

Chapter II

The Parasite of The Commons: Digitalism and the Economy of 'Free Culture'

The parasite invents something new. He obtains energy and pays for it in information. He obtains the roast and pays for it with stories. Two days of writing the new contract. He establishes an unjust pact; relative to the old type of balance, he builds a new one. He speaks in a logic considered irrational up to now, a new epistemology and a new theory of equilibrium. He makes the order of things as well as the states of things – solid and gas – into diagonals. He evaluates information. Even better: he discovers information in his voice and good words; he discovers the Spirit in the wind and the breath of air. He invents cybernetics.
Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

Let's draw up the balance. In the beginning is production: the oil crusher, the butter churn, the smokehouse, the cheesemaker's hut. Yet I would still like to know what *produce* means. Those who call production reproduction make the job easy. Our world is full of copiers and repeaters, all highly rewarded with money and glory. It is better to interpret that to compose; it is better to have an opinion on a decision that has already been made than to make one's own. The modern illness is the engulfing of the new in the *duplicata*, the engulfing of intelligence in the pleasure of the new homogenous. Real production is undoubtedly rare, for it attracts parasites that immediately make it something common and banal. Real production is unexpected and improbable; it overflows with information and is always immediately parasited.
Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

The Biosphere of Machines:
Enter the Parasite

The Living Energy of Machines and the Surplus

Behind technology, there is always energy – a surplus of living energy. Despite a few studies on the 'materialist energies' that constitute 'media ecologies', media theory today is predominantly the science of digital machines as a universe at a remove, or a world apart.[1] The digital has, consequently, become a hegemonic meta-model directed at organizing and arranging the whole of knowledge; the 'language of new media' has been articulated and software finally has gained its Software Studies. Nevertheless, an *energetic* understanding of the media economy remains absent from this theoretical trend, a focus on the *outside* of media, as they tend to be described only through internal languages and endogenic categories. It is not simply the classic McLuhanesque situation: 'We shape our tools and thereafter our tool shape us.' After decades of digital colonization, our tools have now begun to impose their own internal languages to describe themselves. Building an energetic interpretation of media means providing a description of the external energies traversing the machine, and in particular, a renewed concept of *surplus*: any system should be defined by the excess of energy operating it. Here, surplus is understood as the general form of all types of energy related to technology in its most fluid and turbulent state: electricity, data, information, communication, knowledge, imagery, money, labour, desire.

An important clarification, however, is needed to avoid misinterpreting surplus as simply a weak version of the philosophy of desire. If on one side of media studies we have the new philologists of digital code, on the other we encounter sociologists who celebrate the network as a 'space of flows'.[2] *Code* and *flow* – essentially, the debate around media and networks can be summarized as a dialectic between these two concepts, reminiscent of those other terms from contemporary philosophy: *representation* and *production*. The notion of code inherits the modern gnosis of collective intelligence and the postmodernist cult of the simulation (think of *The Matrix*, where Baudrillard is cast as the philosopher of hackers). Conversely, the notion of flow is the bastard heir of French post-Structuralism, specifically, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari

(even despite the fact that Manuel Castells originally defined the 'space of flows' from the perspective of urban theory).[3] *Flow* becomes – like *code* – an endless and abstract space of linear expansion; it is a cheap form of Spinozian ontology. Between *code* and *flow*, however, resides surplus. Surplus is the excess of energy, but also its accumulation. Most importantly, it always implies asymmetry, friction and conflict.

A new interpretation or contemporary revision of surplus is needed; a reading consistent with the classical definitions provided by Marx and Bataille, if something like a canonical tradition of the concept can be said to exist. In modern thought, the notion of surplus has been associated with both vitalism (as in excess of energy, desire and *élan vital*) and Marxism (as in surplus-value extorted from the workers and then capitalized). A general figure of surplus, however, can simply refer to different forms of energy traversing the machine. Contrary to the notion of *flow*, the concept of surplus can never be separated from its consumption, accumulation or sacrifice. Surplus includes its *negative*, rather than being an isolated *positive* process. A surplus of energy does not flow eternally – it is temporary like life, it breaks. If the academic interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of desire is still used to idealize network society as a space of endless flows, it is absolutely necessary today to illuminate the dystopian reality of this energy surplus.

In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille described society as the management of excessive energies that are constantly being reincarnated as new forms of the state and economy.[4] From his perspective, even the contemporary mediascape can be framed as an ecosystem driven by the outgrowth of natural energies. Media are indeed feral habitats, whose underbelly is navigated daily by large torrents of pornography and whose surface becomes the battlefield for geopolitical warfare. Media are fed by the same excess energy that shapes economic and social conflicts. But has this media energy surplus ever been effectively described? If not, what understanding of energy is unconsciously utilized by traditions of media criticism? Bataille would perhaps be a perfect guide for an exploratory tour of the mediascape, but only after freeing him from the *academic expenditure* and *leisure subcultures* that have worked to neutralize his thought. Indeed, Bataille's vision of the world is not an accommodating one: he consistently maintained that living organisms manifested more energy than what was required to preserve a normal life.

> Neither growth nor reproduction would be possible if plants and animals did not normally dispose of an excess. The very principle of living matter requires that the chemical operations of life, which demand an expenditure of energy, be gainful, productive of surpluses.[5]

An excess of energy (or wealth in the case of society) is intended for collective growth, but if the system can no longer grow, it is condemned to consume the excess 'gloriously or catastrophically'.[6] What is the role of technology in contemporary production, consumption and the sacrifice of energy? To pose the question from a different angle: how can media culture be reconceived starting from a radical understanding of surplus? What is the place of surplus theory today and who are the radical thinkers capable of articulating these concerns?

To zoom out from the computer screen, the scenario appears vast and nebulous. The relations of surplus and excess are wide-ranging. The general economy of media is immersed in an accumulation of profits, capital and flows of surplus value, but also energy consumption and crisis, media violence and Internet pornography, the exploitation of online labour and digital alienation, massive file sharing and the entropy of blogs. There are multiple dark sides to the *technological contract,* but they appear as missing links in today's sanitized media debate.[7] Even contemporary radical thought prefers accommodating descriptions and analysis of the real, with no room for uncontrollable energies. For this precise reason, Bataille's notion of 'general economy' is useful as a theoretical framework for considering the broad field of forces beyond traditional economic laws. Fluxes of money, workers and commodities should not be analysed from a quantitative point of view alone. Bataille recognized the productive forces behind the real economy, but to avoid any neo-romantic or conservative vitalism, he described them as 'biochemical energy'. Tearing media away from their abstract destiny in a digital matrix, communication can be re-inscribed into the metabolism of this biochemical paradigm. There is no 'Second Life', no autonomous cyberspace – all machines belong to the *bios.* Take the machinic exoskeleton of a car: it still requires biological energy to run, a fossil fuel. *Biochemical energy* or *living energy* is an anti-analytic concept that illuminates the unpredictable hypertrophy of media. *Living energy* as in *living labour* – to bridge the distance between (good) vitalism and Marxism, and break with any natural idealism.

The notion of living energy must be defended from simplistic readings of *biopolitics* (hyper-Foucauldian interpretations of Foucault), especially approaches that identify all forms of life with paranoid concretions of power. More importantly, living energy must be defended from the recent trend of *bioart*, an emerging field innocently supporting a dominant technological paradigm that reduces life to genetic and digital code. Academia and art circles honestly believe that life and technology can be progressively or critically merged while they play with DNA under the framework of popular genetic technologies. Interestingly, here the word *life* points always to *code* (the *logos*) but never to *energy* (the *bios*, in my interpretation). As life is trapped into a set of instructions, radical thought cannot escape the cage of a *born-again digital* scientism. 'Data made flesh' is both an artistic and neoliberal gnostic credo.[8] The argument must be reversed to avoid both neo-scientism and obscurantism: how did the flesh start producing data? How did human evolution embrace the digital? Where does the living energy of machines flow? Some basic questions are necessary to inaugurate a 'general economy' of machines, and, hopefully, a new field of investigation for media culture and art.

More precisely, what kind of surplus are we looking for? Surplus of energy, libido, value, money or information? Machines are systems that both accumulate energy surplus and consume, transform and dissipate it. According to alternative media discourse, Bataille could only be enrolled to justify a sort of *digital potlatch*, a furious but ultimately sterile mass reproduction of digital copies. On the contrary, keeping with his theory of general economy, we must actually acknowledge how energy is maintained inside machines, crossing and feeding a multitude of devices. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille himself considers labour and technology as an extension of life that accumulates energy and provides conditions for an enhanced reproduction of the species. Like 'tree branches and bird wings in nature', technology opens new spaces to be populated.[9] Coincidently, at the same time as Bataille's writings, anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan began to consider biological evolution as a model for technical development.[10] *Anthropogenesis* necessarily implies *technogenesis*, as Bernard Stiegler reminds us, in a sort of 'zootechnological determinism'.[11] But there is something more: technology accompanies the double movement of the excess of life – produc-

tion and dissipation. It must be said, however, from the greasy engines of early industrialization to the aseptic minimal design of the latest personal media, the living materiality of technology has been removed by 'Machinic Studies' – it has become but an unconscious everyday companion of the human libido.

What happens when information technologies and especially digital networks enter the mediascape and biosphere? What kind of energy do digital machines incarnate? Just a further extension of biochemical energy like the classical technologies that Bataille had in mind? My hypothesis is that digital machines are a clear bifurcation of the *machinic phylum*: the semiotic and biologic domains represent two different strata of evolution, and the digital machine a further bifurcation compared to analogue technologies. The energy of semiotic flows is not equivalent to the energy of material and economic flows. The separation of the digital stratum from the analogue was not a smooth transition. Digital technology developed an *intensive* scale of depth and a meta-modelling language that was completely missing in the analogue world.[12] From a political point of view, that separation implies that any attempt to directly translate the digital into the social only produces partial effects and confusion, if not disaster. Of course, the two spheres interact, but not in the symmetrical and specular way that digital culture is regularly conceived – an ideology that will be introduced as *digitalism*.

Michel Serres and the Cybernetic Parasite

Energy always flows in one direction. For those acquainted with the scenario of the network society and its celebration of the *space of flows*, a safari with Bataille along the ecosystems of excess is useful for rediscovering the dystopian nature of capitalism. In Bataille, economic surplus is strictly related to a libidinal excess, enjoyment and sacrifice. Yet between endless fluxes and their 'glorious expenditure',[13] a specific explanatory model for the accumulation of surplus is still missing. Attuned to the undercurrents of French vitalism, Michel Serres captures the asymmetry of universal life in the conceptual figure of the *parasite*. In his influential book of the same title, Serres describes how the exchange of energy between organisms is never equal, but always constituted by a parasite stealing energy and feeding on another organism. From this basic premise, Serres builds a new universal economy:

'The parasitic relation is intersubjective. It is the atomic form of our relations. Let us try to face it head-on, like death, like the sun. We are all attacked, together.'[14]

Cellular dystopia: at the dawn of the computer age (*Le Parasite* was originally published in 1980), the concept of the parasite becomes the pioneer of a materialistic critique of all the forms of thought based on a binary model of energy. For Serres, the elementary link is always ternary, involving a third element affecting the other two. Weirdly, the 'semiconductors' of Serres steal energy instead of computing:

> Man is a louse for other men. Thus man is a host for other men. The flow goes one way, never the other. I call this semiconduction, this valve, this single arrow, this relation without a reversal of direction, 'parasitic.'[15]

The dimension of energy excess can be either positive or negative, depending on the point of observation. If Bataille identifies the expenditure of energy after production, Serres demonstrates how 'abuse' has always been at work since the beginning of accumulation. 'Abuse appears before use' – with Marxist connotations, an *abuse-value* is introduced as preceding both *use-value* and *exchange-value*. In the language of Serres' energy analytics, 'it is the arrow with only one direction'. An asymmetrical arrow that absorbs and condenses energy in a natural continuum passing through organisms, animals and human beings: 'the parasite parasites the parasites', his mantra repeats.

In the early 1980s, the parasite made its appearance like a dystopian version of Deleuze and Guattari's desiring machines: an endless exploitation of surplus is posited as a counterpart to the endless production of desire. The parasite is the anomalous molecular side of nature, society, economy and technology. It actually represents quite a serene account of human existence, despite Serres' description of *The Parasite* as 'the book of evil'. Serres places the human at the top of the parasitic hierarchy of ecology and environments, while society itself is inscribed within an implicit civil war of parasites.

> History hides the fact that man is the universal parasite, that everything and everyone around him is a hospitable space. Plants and

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animals are always his hosts; man is always necessarily their guest. Always taking, never giving. He bends the logic of exchange and of giving in his favour when he is dealing with nature as a whole. When he is dealing with his kind, he continues to do so; he wants to be the parasite of man as well. And his kind want to be so too. Hence rivalry.[16]

Serres describes society and economics as an extension of natural forces. His language even favours living figures to technological metaphors. Recognizing the Leviathan of both the collective and microparasites, Serres inaugurates a zoomorphic democracy. His philosophy is directed toward 'reversing anthropomorphism' and proposing 'an organic model for the members of a society', but without promoting a new totality through naturalistic nostalgia.

We parasite each other and live among parasites. Which is more or less a way of saying that they constitute our environment. We live in that black box called the collective; we live by it, on it, and in it. It so happens that this collective was given the form of an animal: Leviathan. We are certainly within something bestial; in more distinguished terms, we are speaking of an organic model for the members of a society. Our host? I don't know. But I do know that we are within. And that it is dark in there.[17]

In the end, are we confronted finally with a global scenario of pure parasitic life? Somehow, for Serres, the parasite is more a technical or neutral concept with no inherent political connotations. Parasites produce life: 'Everything ferments; everything rots. Everything changes.' In his history of humankind, the 'alliance with the parasites' is understood as being a constituent element of the process of anthropogenesis and the history of civilization (for instance, with food processing and health care: bread and wine are fermented and purified by good parasites, a fact widely accepted by modern science). Symbiosis with other organisms is a complex relation. Serres reveals how endo-colonization is a common practice of the relation between humans and nature.

Our relation to animals is more interesting – I mean to the animals we eat. We adore eating veal, lamb, beef, antelope, pheasant, or

grouse, but we don't throw away their 'leftovers'. We dress in leather and adorn ourselves with feathers. Like the Chinese, we devour duck without wasting a bit; we eat the whole pig, from head to tail; but we get under these animals' skin as well, in their plumage or in their hide. Men in clothing live within the animals they devoured. And the same thing for plants. We eat rice, wheat, apples, the divine eggplant, the tender dandelion; but we also weave silk, linen, cotton; we live within the flora as much as we live within the fauna. We are parasites; thus we clothe ourselves. Thus we live within tents of skins like the gods within their tabernacles. Look at him well-dressed and adorned, magnificent; he shows – he showed – the clean carcass of his host.[18]

The symbiosis with machines is complex too. Serres shares the same vitalism of Bataille, but additionally provides a revolutionary punctual model of the relation between material and immaterial, biologic and semiotic, economy and media. The organic model of the parasite is also embraced as the core concept of a new (organic) understanding of media ecosystems.[19] Indeed, prophetically, Serres introduced cybernetics (and its extension, the network) as a late manifestation of the parasitic food chain.

The parasite invents something new. He obtains energy and pays for it in information. He obtains the roast and pays for it with stories. Two days of writing the new contract. He establishes an unjust pact; relative to the old type of balance, he builds a new one. He speaks in a logic considered irrational up to now, a new epistemology and a new theory of equilibrium. He makes the order of things as well as the states of things – solid and gas – into diagonals. He evaluates information. Even better: he discovers information in his voice and good words; he discovers the Spirit in the wind and the breath of air. He invents cybernetics.[20]

After depicting the 'information revolution' as a truly emancipatory movement for decades, it is quite difficult to acknowledge its parasitic side. Furthermore, Serres applies the same parasitic model to intellectual labour and to the network itself (as *techné* is an extension of the deceptive nature of *logos*): 'This cybernetics gets more and more complicated,

makes a chain, then a network. Yet it is founded on the theft of information, quite a simple thing.'[21]

Serres' opportunistic relation between intellectual and material production may sound traditionalist, but even when Negri and Lazzarato began to describe the 'hegemony of intellectual labour', the exploitive dimension of capital over mass intellectuality was clearly apparent.[22] Today, the *immaterial parasite* (as the symbiosis of digital networks and immaterial labour can be interpreted) has become endemic – everyone is carrying an intellectual and cybernetic parasite. What then happens to the notion of multitude, intended as the self-organization of the general intellect into an antagonistic subject, when the parasite of intellectual labour enters the political arena? What happens to Free Culture, digital commons and peer-to-peer paradigms when the network infrastructure is itself portrayed as a vampiric tentacular creature? From this perspective, it is finally necessary to reintroduce a sharp asymmetry between the semiotic and the social, the technological and the biological levels – between the material and the immaterial. If network technology must be recognized as a new sociopolitical form, this can only be done on the basis of a dynamic and tactical alliance with an asymmetrical and dystopian economy.

The parasite re-orientates the energetic relation between machines and life. Without trying to rewrite the history of communication in one move, media have routinely been described according to particular recurring models: information channels, body prostheses, mimetic devices, desiring machines, virtual worlds, autonomous devices and, more recently, cooperative and social networks. Cyberpunk and cyborg subcultures (respectively, online and offline hybrid organisms) represented the founding mythologies of the new techno-multitudes, but their dystopian and parasitic nature has gradually been cleansed through a progressive technological fetishism. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desiring machines has found a similar destiny, even if it represented a rigorous conceptualization of the machinic colonization of the biosphere against both vitalism and mechanism. And a *binary representation* of the machine is still maintained today by legions of media artists and academics following this tendency. I want to stress the binary model of the cyborg as the real subtext of media culture since its foundation, binary because the notion of cyborg is ultimately

synthesized through a dualistic exchange of energy. The challenge is not to perpetuate anthropocentrism and techno-fetishism, but to reveal which understanding of surplus is unconsciously inscribed in these models of media. The founding figure of the cyborg does not provide any economic understanding of the biochemical energy exchanged through technology. To understand the parasitic dimension of the network, it is more useful to refer to Deleuze and Guattari's *apparatus of capture* developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For this concept, surplus is extracted according to the 'trinity formula' of rent, profit and taxation. However, the third age of technical machines also carries along its own unique forms of *machinic enslavement* and *social subjection*.[23] 'If motorized machines constituted the second age of technical machines, cybernetic and informational machines form a third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection.'[24]

A decade before in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari introduced three types of surplus value: code surplus, flow surplus and machinic surplus. Machinic surplus, in particular, is the surplus extracted by a machinic assemblage (freely composed by humans, tools, animals, and so forth). The merit of Serres is to encapsulate these conceptual elements in another elegant formula: the parasite.

After three decades of 'machinic' literacy, a move towards a dystopian *zoology of machines* must be established – even if only to rescue Deleuze and Guattari's thought from becoming a *technical language* or an academic *procedural knowledge*. However, this new 'animal' model for digital culture is also needed to fight the combinatory model of genetics that has become the dominant toolbox whenever life is approached. Following Deleuze and Guattari's *geologism* and DeLanda's *new materialism* of morphogenesis, more effort should be focussed on a *new organicism*.[25] A partial or open organicism is required as an affective approach to the world of machines positioned against the dominance of *digitalism* (as I define the cult of the *code* against the materiality of *energy*). Organicism does not mean a new vitalism, but an acknowledgement of the dystopian reality driven by unstable cycles of surplus, entropy and negentropy. Capital, machines and organisms need surplus to breed. A natural or artificial ecosystem is never generous. There is always an asymmetrical arrow crossing it, an asymmetrical tension dividing the political field.

Through the conceptual figure of the immaterial parasite, I want to describe the transformation and exploitation of the *bios* by the technological and semiotic domain. Material energy and economic surplus are not simply absorbed or consumed by new semio-technologies, they are also reallocated in favour of specific nodes of the machinic network. Like a natural form of life, the immaterial parasite runs efficiently and consumes less energy than what it accumulates to function. The immaterial flow extracts surplus from material energies through continuous exchanges and assemblages between different domains. Electricity turns to data, data to communication, communication to desire, desire to money, money to knowledge, knowledge to technology, and so on. The media economy is a symbiosis of different strata, a continuum of horizontal and vertical exchanges, but it is certainly not a flat market based on purely cooperative exchanges.

The immaterial parasite initially functions as a spectacular device. Simulating a fictional world, building a collaborative environment or simply providing communication channels, the immaterial parasite forms a symbiosis of desire with its host. The biological definition of parasite is crucial since it always implies an *alliance* and *non-hostile relation*: the parasite never desires the death of its host. The parasite is not a vampire, but a symbiont. In this sense, the relation between the machine and the human is a relation of mutual desire, of seduction and fetishism. Similarly, even the economy of the immaterial parasite is not based on direct exploitation and profit extortion. On the contrary, economic rent becomes the dominant form of metabolism. The immaterial parasite always belongs to a diverse family and can survive in different kinds of habitat. Its tentacles, for instance, can innervate the metropolis (real estate speculation through the 'creative cities' hype), the mediascape (rent over material infrastructures and online space monopolies), the software industry (exploiting Free Software to sell proprietary hardware), the knowledge economy (revenue on intellectual property), the financial markets (stock exchange speculation on collective behaviour) and many other potential spaces.

Diagram of an Immaterial Parasite

The diagram of an immaterial parasite is not simply a topography of forces, but an economic balance of energies and surpluses. The im-

material parasite (more precisely a *digital parasite*, as portrayed figure 1 is a *dispositif* that extracts surplus through the technological infrastructure that connects the semiotic with the biological sphere. The concept of the immaterial parasite is conceived against the autonomy of the digital sphere. Borrowing the language of Deleuze and Guattari, who effectively described concepts in a materialistic and constructivist way, we may say an immaterial parasite is an *agencement* between digital life and everyday life, an apparatus that cuts through semiotic, technological and biological space. The opposition *material-immaterial* [1] should be introduced to describe the specific habitat of this interstitial organism, but in actuality, this opposition works to simplify a more complex stratification. The media ecosystem is composed by semiotic, technological and biological layers, and below that, by an energetic and nonorganic substratum (similarly, even computer network protocols have an architecture based on a stratification of layers).[26] The exchange of energy between these strata is never symmetrical and fluid: for instance, semiotic production through digital media consumes a small amount of bioenergy compared with material production proper. In fact, what really consumes energy and allocates surplus is the material substratum of the technological infrastructure, where the greatest amount of energy is exchanged (and money as well as physical labour and commodities) [4]. The online economy constantly manages offline surplus value.

Humans and animals feed on the same energy that drives technology: they are *biological machines*, to use a retroactive term that keeps them on the same technological level [2]. Biological machines represent the production and consumption of 'wet' energy – that is, living energy, including *living labour*. Similarly, intellectual labour can be considered living labour, since it requires the body and energy to be produced. But when digital media reach a critical mass, an anthropocentric shift occurs: immaterial labour becomes a fixation on software and digital communication, a complex that can be defined as *code fetishism*. This notion is proposed hypothetically as the last incarnation of commodity fetishism, and as the libidinal engine behind the radical aspects of digital life (such as the cognitive enjoyment of hackers for coding).[27] Software programs are actually a simulation of organisms and machines: in this sense, they are *digital machines* [3], even if they

are perceived as immaterial and do not directly exchanging bioenergy, but data. They establish a sort of fictional economy in the virtual matrix through the free and endless reproduction of information. Within the self-referential sphere of code fetishism, this online economy is presented as perfectly smooth and symmetrical, or equal and democratic when transposed into a social context. On the contrary, a differential of real energy (and social positions) is always exchanged through the hardware layer of computers and the technological infrastructure [4].

Digitalism is, for now, a basic designation for the widespread belief that Internet-based communication can be free from any form of exploitation and will naturally evolve towards a society of equal peers. From an economic perspective, advocates of digitalism believe that 'energy-free' digital reproduction can affect energy-expensive modes of material production. Digitalism is a catchall term for an attitude that persists to varying degrees throughout many contemporary subcultures, such as Free Software supporters, the Creative Commons initiative, the art world inspired by Open Source, Internet-based forms of activism, etcetera. In the digitalist paradigm, the notion of *peer production* has a central role: each node of the network has virtually the same power as any other. Digitalism adheres to a belief in the network as a horizontal democracy of nodes that produce and exchange on an equal basis. Peer production implies an abstract *binary model*, while the production always follows a *ternary model* [5], as Serres has shown. In the binary model of the network, there can be no room or explanation of surplus: two nodes both produce and exchange in a symmetrical way. Alternatively, a clear asymmetry is the key engine of the ternary model. In the actual economy, there is always a surplus produced since the exchange is never equal on the molecular scale. The ternary model is the diagram of Serres' parasite and the law of nature, constantly dominated by excess, entropy and negentropy. A 'socialism' of networks can only be established after managing the asymmetry of the ternary ecosystem, not by removing it through the abstraction of a binary circuit.

Ultimately, the *immaterial parasite* [6] is an assemblage of semiotic, technological and biological strata that extracts an energy surplus (in the form of labour as well as money or libidinal investments). The im-

material parasite functions through the material infrastructure and allocates a surplus to another economic entity (mainly private companies, but occasionally other users or state organizations). In economic terms, these parasitic dynamics do not point to the extraction of surplus via a direct profit (from labour) but through monopolistic rent, applied on the technological infrastructure or on the basis of a dominant market position [7]. The digital parasite is a specific case of technological rent: new monopolies applied on the material infrastructures that host Internet life and even the so-called digital commons. The consciousness of the parasitic economy behind network technologies is nothing more than a new *materialism*. However, the two terms *digitalism* and *materialism* do not form an easy binary opposition: a materialistic perspective foregrounds the asymmetry of the immaterial-material relation and the *arrow of surplus*. By implying the presence and influence of an immaterial layer, materialism can take the name of *meta-materialism*. Digitalism, on the other hand, claims the status and primacy of the informational over materiality.

A practical example of technological parasitism is the crisis of the music industry in the early 2000s, a situation provoked by the massive sharing of audio files over P2P networks. Here, the economic effect of digital reproduction is clear: 'fair use' on a global scale has now weakened the accumulation of intellectual property revenues. More accurately, file sharing over the Internet has killed the sales of the music medium itself (the compact disc), but at the same time, it has sustained a new generation of personal media like MP3 players and iPods. Economic interests were re-organized around a monopoly of physical media and infrastructure rather than intellectual property rights. P2P networks may have weakened the music industry, but the surplus has been reallocated in favour of companies producing new forms of hardware or controlling access to the Internet. It represents a passage from an economy based on IP to an economy based on the parasitic exploitation of a common space and shared resources (the legal or illegal status of these resources is not a crucial factor for major corporations). This relation between a cognitive product and its material medium, moreover, can broadly be applied to other cases, as will become clearer in the following section on economic rent and cognitive capitalism.
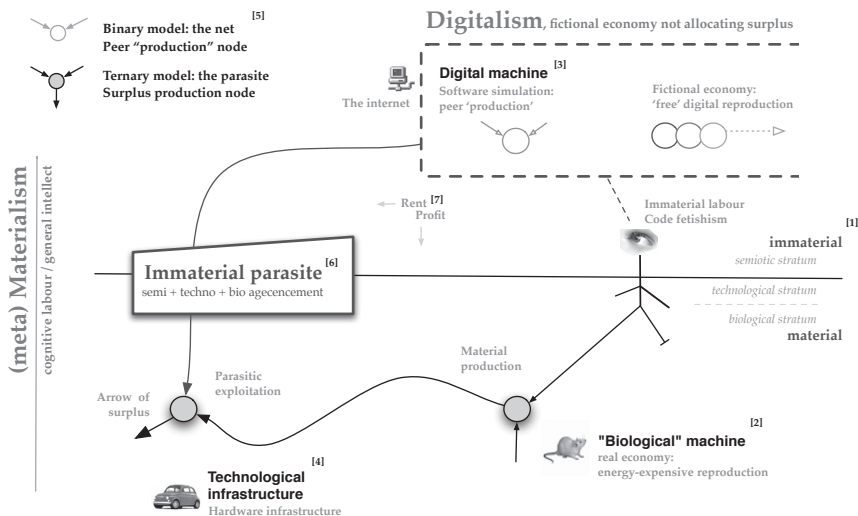
Diagram of an immaterial parasite

Intermezzo: Baudrillard in the Whirlpool of Sign

Baudrillard and media studies are a fatal liaison, and a good example of the weak characteristics of a particular tradition of radical thought (really, a *radical-chic thought*). To consistently map out the critical aspects of surplus theory, it might be useful to compare the digital culture of the 2000s with the reception of the information revolution in other cultural contexts. The removal of the ground of production (and implicitly of surplus) had a crucial role in the development of early postmodern thought, in particular, the work of Jean Baudrillard. His theoretical model was initiated in the early 1970s as a critique of Marxist conceptions of *use-value*, *exchange-value* and the 'ideology of production'. In effect, Baudrillard attempted to rewrite a theory of value by embracing the regime of broadcast television as the only existential and political horizon. Starting with Marx, his apocalyptic vocation took over and exploded in the early 1980s, a trajectory clearly visible in his books' titles: *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), *The Mirror of Production* (1973), *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), *Seduction* (1979), *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) and *Fatal Strategies* (1983).

Still influenced by the atmosphere of the 1960s, the early Baudrillard was obsessed by the semiotic value of the commodity. He then interpreted economic value as fatally destined to become pure semiotic meaning under the Empire of Signs, and so, a pure phantasm, ready for the long winter of the 1980s. Marx's industrial model of production was dismissed as no longer appropriate for deciphering the becoming-immaterial of the commodity. While surplus usually circulates through signs, media, commodities or factories, Baudrillard extracted value as an artificial flower without roots, as meaning without the surplus that constitutes it. On the contrary, value is not only immaterial, but always connected to a surplus across a more general ecology of excess. The value is created between a sign and a surplus. Yet according to Baudrillard in *A Critique for the Political Economy of the Sign*:

> It is because the structure of the sign is at the very heart of the commodity form that the commodity can take on, immediately, the effect of signification: not epiphenomenally, in excess of itself, as 'message' or connotation, but because its very form establishes it as a total medium, as a system of communication administering all social exchange. Like the sign form, the commodity is a code managing the exchange of values.[28]

Commodities themselves became media (but the process also followed another direction: the new episteme of mass media permeated the soul of old political thought where it was celebrated and valorised). Mass media projects around itself a highly material economy, but Baudrillard's interpretation followed a strictly immaterial line: they only project virtual surplus value. No flows of energy, electricity, desire, labour or bodies are involved. The fact that the material surplus was obliterated in this way, long before the rise of the network society and under a different media regime (when television screens rather than computer screens were dominant), reveals something about the difficult relation of radical thought with technology and its obsessions.

Baudrillard, however, represents the opposite side of this 'unconscious removal' of surplus: not the politically correct and serene plateaux of distributed collaboration, but the fatalistic apocalypse of multiplied simulacra. Cutting the ballast of material production, Baudrillard's

theory departs for the sphere of hyperreality. The power of significa-
tion, simulation and valorisation of the sign literally takes off from its
grounded moorings and becomes a perfect self-referential economy. Like
the digitalists, Baudrillard abandons all links to the productive machine
and embraces the gnostic temptation of the sign. The simulacrum is to
Baudrillard as the digital code is to the Free Culture. In *Symbolic Exchange
and Death*, the *economic* revolution of simulacra is described like this:

> A revolution has put an end to this 'classical' economy of value, a
> revolution which, beyond the commodity form, stretches value to its
> most radical form. . . . Gone are the referentials of production, signifi-
> cation, affect, substance, history, and the whole equation of 'real' con-
> tents that gave the sign weight by anchoring it with a kind of burden
> of utility – in short, its form as representative equivalent. All this is
> surpassed by the other stage of value, that of total relativity, general-
> ized commutative, combinatory simulation.
>
> This means simulation in the sense that from now on signs will
> exchange among themselves exclusively, without interacting with
> the real (and this becomes the condition for their smooth operation).
> The emancipation of the sign: released from any 'archaic' obligation
> it might have had to designate something, the sign is at last free for
> a structural or combinatory play that succeeds the previous role of
> determinate equivalence.[29]

Instead of detecting the frictions and asymmetries of the new cultural
economy, Baudrillard indulges in a dandyish necrophilia of the System.
Like those moments in Marx where capital is cause to its own crisis,
Baudrillard takes capital as the primal force and unique motor behind
the cosmos of simulacra. Value becomes totally virtual, agency for social
subjects is removed and any political gesture disappears as 'undecidable':

> It is not the revolution that puts an end to all of this, but capital
> itself. Capital abolishes social determination through the mode of
> production, and substitutes the structural form of value for the com-
> modity form. And it is capital that determines the current strategy
> of the system. This historical and social mutation can be observed
> at every level. The era of simulation is thus everywhere initiated by

the interchangeability of previously contradictory or dialectically opposed terms. Everywhere the same 'genesis of simulacra': the interchangeability of the beautiful and the ugly in fashion; of the right and the left in politics; of the true and false in every media message; of the useful and the useless at the level of objects; and of nature and culture at every level of meaning. All the great humanist criteria of value, all the values of a civilization of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs. Everything becomes undecidable. This is the characteristic effect of the domination of the code, which is based everywhere on the principle of neutralization and indifference.[30]

Baudrillard's pathetic conclusion is now famous: the political horizon of simulacra can logically terminate only with social apocalypse or suicide. The claustrophobia of code has no other possible exit strategy.

Is it thus necessary to play a game of at least equal complexity, in order to be in opposition to third-order simulations? Is there a subversive theory or practice more random than the system itself? An undetermined subversion, which would be to the order of the code what revolution was to political economy? Can we fight DNA? Certainly not with the blows of class struggle. Can we invent simulacra of an even higher logical (or illogical) order, beyond the current third order, beyond determination and indetermination? If so, would they still be simulations? Perhaps only death, the reversibility of death, is of a higher order than the code.[31]

The death of materiality is an effect of the abstract power of the sign. If the simulacrum is the extension of the virtualization already present in money and the commodity form, the political response should be to underline the conflict between the new order and the old; recognizing the asymmetries and the parasitic relations of the new semio-economy, rather than pursuing a 'higher logic' of greater abstraction. Throughout history, surplus remains placidly material, often organized through immaterial signs. Baudrillard revealed the radical economy of signs in unsuspected times, but was finally drawn into that seductive whirlpool. The consequences of that fatal attraction are still visible today.

Digitalism:
The Impasse of Media Culture

The Flesh Is Made Code

Digitalism is a sort of modern, egalitarian and cheap gnosis, in which the religion of knowledge has been replaced by the Enlightenment cult of the digital network and its code. Erik Davis, for instance, extensively documented this mystical undercurrent of the information society in his book *Techgnosis*.[1] Like a transversal sect, the peculiar economic credo of digitalism has many followers in both the core apparatuses of power (the Californian Ideology) and the communities of political activists (the supporters of Free Culture).[2] In particular, the theoretical and political deployment of digitalism can be tracked through the work of a new generation of thinkers, such as Lawrence Lessig and Yochai Benkler. A summary is useful here to anticipate some general traits or characteristics.

Ontologically, the techno-paradigm of digitalism believes that the semiotic and biologic domains are positioned in parallel or *specular* to each other. As a consequence, the digital can easily render the offline world as a sort of Google-like utopia of universal digitization.[3] A material event can be translated and mapped onto the immaterial plane, and *conversely*, the immaterial can easily be embodied in materiality. This second move – the ease of this transition – is the passage of a millenary misunderstanding that is traditionally described in terms of logocentrism (the power of the divine Word onto the world). Economically, digitalism states that this almost energy-free digital reproduction of data can affect energy-expensive material production, eventually taking it over and triggering social change. The idea of a 'peer-to-peer society' is based on such a virtuous circle supposedly governed by online *free cooperation*. Certainly, digital programming can dematerialize any communications technology and reorganize old media forms (email replacing mail, etcetera), but it cannot *easily* affect biomass production and, in particular, its surplus economy. Politically, digitalism believes in a mutual gift society. The Internet is supposed to be virtually free from any exploitation, tending naturally towards a democratic equilibrium and natural cooperation. Here, digitalism works as a disembodied politics

with no acknowledgement of the offline labour sustaining the online world (a *class divide* that precedes any *digital divide*). Ecologically, digitalism promotes itself as an environmentally friendly and zero-emission machine against the pollution of older Fordist modes of industrial production, and yet it is estimated that an avatar on Second Life consumes more electricity that the average Brazilian.[4]

Just as Marx emphasized commodity fetishism at the opening of *Capital*, code fetishism should be considered as the basis of the network economy. Indeed, a whole tradition has originated from Marx's foundational reading, inspiring media philosophers from Debord to Baudrillard. Today, however, the fetishism of code is shared by both alternative thought and neoliberal discourse. 'God Is The Machine', Kevin Kelly's digitalist manifesto, proclaimed these points distinctly: computation can describe all things, all things can compute, all computation is one.[5] At the same time, code is the DNA of any virtual world, the substance of immaterial labour, the battlefield of intellectual property and the fuel for the collective intelligence of programmers. It is a sort of intelligent object that moves far beyond Marx's original premonitions on commodities:

> There it is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race.[6]

Actually, code may both represent and manage the productive relation between workers more effectively than the commodity form. Code as a form of language and machinery is fundamentally *relational* and can easily establish its own fictional economy (as Baudrillard already observed). The commodity fetishism of the nineteenth century has become the code phantasmagoria of the twenty-first century, to the extent that the materiality of the commodity is effectively removed. According to the quasi-religious tradition mentioned before, code fetishism incarnates again the credo of the supremacy of the Word over material production.

Digitalism is one of those political models influenced by technological evolution and not social conflict – as McLuhan repeatedly stated: 'We shape our tools, and afterwards our tools shape us.'[7] The Internet, in the beginning, was fuelled by the political dreams of the American counterculture of the 1960s. Today, according to the tradition of post-Operaismo, the Network is simultaneously the form of Empire and the tool for the self-organization of the Multitude.[8] Only in Anglo-American culture, however, do we find a faith in the primacy of technology over politics. If activists today apply the Free Software model to traditional artefacts and talk of a 'GPL society'[9] and 'P2P production',[10] this is a consequence of the belief in a pure symmetry of the technological over the social.

In this sense, the definition of Free Culture gathers together all those subcultures that have established a fundamental political agenda around the free reproduction of digital files. The kick off was the slogan 'information wants to be free', launched by Stewart Brand at the first Hackers' Conference in 1984. (Interestingly, the original statement contained a much more nuanced meaning in context: 'On the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it's so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other.')[11] Later, the hacker underground boosted the Free Software movement and a new chain of keywords was generated: Open Source, Open Content, Gift Economy, Digital Commons, Free Cooperation, Knowledge Sharing and other do-it-yourself versions like Open Source Architecture, Open Source Art, and so on. *Free Culture* is also the title of a famous book by Lawrence Lessig, founder of the Creative Commons initiative.[12] Rather than focussing on the social value and crucial battles of the Free Software movement within the digital sphere, however, what should finally be addressed is the possibility of an offline application of this paradigm.

There is an old saying that still resounds: *the word is made flesh.* A religious unconscious seems to be at work behind the contemporary technological credo. In his book *Words Made Flesh*, Florian Cramer clearly illustrates the genealogy of code culture in the ancient traditions of the West belonging to Judaism, Christianity, Pythagoreans, the Kabbalah and Hermeticism.[13] As Serres would suggest, however, the primordial

adage should be reversed to unveil its hidden dimension or underside: *the flesh is made code*. The knowledge itself is the parasitic strategy of the flesh. The spirit proceeds from the animal. The flesh comes first, before *logos*. There is nothing digital in the digital dream. Enmeshed with a global economy, every bit of 'free' information carries its own microslave like a forgotten twin.

The Ideology of Free Culture

Free Culture and Creative Commons are the two leading keywords for both progressive institutions and activist counterculture during the first decade of the 2000s. Literature on *freeculturalism* is vast, usually divided in two fronts: libertarian supporters and neoliberal conservative critics.[14] If Lawrence Lessig's *Free Culture* is the manifesto, Andrew Keen's *The Cult of the Amateur* is the reactionary response.[15] From another perspective, however, the literature on freeculturalism can be critically examined through the issue of *surplus* and the underlying model of surplus-value that remains invisible or unacknowledged. Starting from the main authors like Stallman and Lessig, a fundamental question would be: where does the surplus production reside in the so-called Free Society? Is the Free Society a society liberated from the contradictions of surplus? The whole battle for Free Software and Free Culture has been established around issues of *property rights* rather than *production*. However, on closer examination, the spectres of surplus always re-emerge as a persistent concern. In *Free Culture*, Lessig articulates the Creative Commons initiative in terms of Anglo-American rights-based discourse, where the right to *free speech* is directly associated with the rights of the *free market*:

> We come from a tradition of 'free culture' – not 'free' as in 'free beer' (to borrow a phrase from the founder of the free-software movement), but 'free' as in 'free speech,' 'free markets,' 'free trade,' 'free enterprise,' 'free will,' and 'free elections.'

Throughout the book, Lessig implicitly embraces the credo of a universal digitization of culture (that is, *digitalism*). The Internet infrastructure that makes this 'free' reproduction possible is never questioned, but conceived in terms of 'technology in transition', a movement towards

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the further digitization of life.[16] Lessig takes inspiration from copyleft and hacker culture, specifically quoting the seminal essay 'Free Software, Free Society' by Richard Stallman.[17] Although Stallman refers primarily to software, Lessig extends his paradigm to the entire spectrum of cultural artefacts. In other words, software is conceptualized as a universal political model. While the book offers a useful critique of the current regime of copyright, it also represents an apology of sorts for the generic freedom of digital media – at least until Lessig finally invokes a great evil for any libertarian, interestingly, only at the conclusion of the book: *taxation*.[18] Searching for a practical economic model to legitimize Free Culture after the digital tsunami has thrown the music and film industries into crisis, Lessig has to provide an *alternative compensation system* to reward creators for their works.[19] To solve the financial predicament of the content industry, therefore, he modifies a proposal originally offered by Harvard law professor William Fisher, and later expanded on in the book *Promises to Keep*.

> Under his plan, all content capable of digital transmission would (1) be marked with a digital watermark . . . . Once the content is marked, then entrepreneurs would develop (2) systems to monitor how many items of each content were distributed. On the basis of those numbers, then (3) artists would be compensated. The compensation would be paid for by (4) an appropriate tax.[20]

That the solution to the media industry crisis for the 'tradition of free culture' is a new form of *taxation* sounds strangely paradoxical. The tracking of Internet downloads and their charge would imply a strong centralized public intervention that is quite unusual for neoliberalist countries such as the USA – the system is realistically imaginable only, for instance, in a Scandinavian social democracy. Indeed, the actual implementation of this scheme remains unclear. Another passage, meanwhile, discusses this dilemma more explicitly, but suggests that intellectual property must be finally sacrificed in order to gain a more expansive Internet. Here, Lessig's intuition is correct (for capitalism's sake): he is aware that the market needs a self-generative space to establish new monopolies and new types of rent. A dynamic space is more important than a lazy copyright regime. Lessig provocatively asks:

> Is it better (a) to have a technology that is 95 percent secure and produces a market of size x, or (b) to have a technology that is 50 percent secure but produces a market of five times x? Less secure might produce more unauthorized sharing, but it is likely to also produce a much bigger market in authorized sharing. The most important thing is to assure artists' compensation without breaking the Internet.[21]

'Without breaking the Internet': the protection of the new frontier is the utmost priority before all else. In this sense, Creative Commons licences help to expand and ameliorate new spaces of the market. Or as John Perry Barlow puts it: 'For ideas, fame *is* fortune. And nothing makes you famous faster than an audience willing to distribute your work for free.'[22] Despite its political aspirations, the friction-free space of digitalism actually accelerates towards an even more competitive scenario. From this perspective, Benkler is wrong when he claims that 'information is non-rival' in *The Wealth of Networks*.[23] The non-rivalry of information is another important postulate of *freeculturalism.* Lessig and Benkler both assume that free digital reproduction will not cause competition, but cooperation. Of course, rivalry is not produced by digital copies, but by their friction with real economy, material contexts and limited resources. For example, attention is crucial for the consumption of any kind of 'cognitive commodity' such as music, but it is a limited and material resource. Digital bonanza becomes competition when it has to access the very small window of human 'uptime'. In his book, Benkler celebrates 'peer production' as the source of new social wealth, but actually refers only to the easy *immaterial reproduction.* Predictably, Free Software and Wikipedia are over-quoted as the main examples of 'social production' (this definition, again, covers exclusively the *online* 'social production'). Throughout the entire book, materiality remains in the background, like a 3D effect of a cheap hologram image from a postcard.

Against the Creative Anti-Commons

In the mid-2000s, after an initial honeymoon period, the Creative Commons (CC) initiative started to face growing criticism, especially from radical European media culture. Scanning the articles from this period, two strands of critique can immediately be distinguished in the progressive field: those who claim the institution of a real commonality

against Creative Commons restrictions (non-commercial, share-alike, et-cetera) and those who point out Creative Commons complicity with glo-bal capitalism (and underline labour exploitation, value accumulation and the social conflicts behind any IP domain). As an example of the first trend, code theorist Florian Cramer provides an in-depth and thorough analysis in his text, 'The Creative Common Misunderstanding':

> To say that something is available under a CC license is meaningless in practice. . . . The objections are substantial and boil down to the following points: that the Creative Commons licenses are fragment-ed, do not define a common minimum standard of freedoms and rights granted to users or even fail to meet the criteria of free licenses altogether, and that unlike the Free Software and Open Source move-ments, they follow a philosophy of reserving rights of copyright owners rather than granting them to audiences.[24]

Berlin-based Neoist Anna Nimus (alias Dmytri Kleiner and Joanne Rich-ardson) agrees with Cramer that Creative Commons does not provide the regulatory conditions for a real common to emerge. According to Nimus, the CC licences protect only the producers, while the consumer rights are relatively undefined: 'Creative Commons legitimates, rather than denies, producer-control and enforces, rather than abolishes, the distinction between producer and consumer. It expands the legal frame-work for producers to deny consumers the possibility to create use-val-ue or exchange-value out of the common stock.'[25] Nimus endorses the total freedom for consumers to produce use-value out of common stock (like in the model defended by the Free Software foundation), but more importantly, to also produce exchange-value – which means a freedom of commercial use. For Nimus, a commons is defined by its produc-tive consumers, not merely by its producers or passive consumers. She claims that CC licences limit the commons through multiple restric-tions rather than opening it up to productivity. In short, they become 'Creative Anti-Commons'.

> The public domain, anticopyright and copyleft are all attempts to create a commons, a shared space of non-ownership that is free for everyone to use. . . . By contrast, Creative Commons is an attempt to

use a regime of property ownership (copyright law) to create a non-owned, culturally shared resource. Its mixed bag of cultural goods are not held in common since it is the choice of individual authors to permit their use or to deny it. Creative Commons is really an anti-commons that peddles a capitalist logic of privatization under a deliberately misleading name.[26]

Nimus points out an interesting *class composition* that has evolved from the historical transformation of the anti-copyright underground: 'The dissidents of intellectual property have had a rich history among avant-garde artists, zine producers, radical musicians, and the subcultural fringe. Today the fight against intellectual property is being led by lawyers, professors and members of government.'[27] These forces have been co-opted by capitalism precisely through the Creative Commons framework that attempts to introduce private property into the public domain, rather than questioning the notion of copyright itself:

> What began as a movement for the abolition of intellectual property has become a movement of customizing owners' licenses. Almost without notice, what was once a very threatening movement of radicals, hackers and pirates is now the domain of reformists, revisionists, and apologists for capitalism. When capital is threatened, it co-opts its opposition.[28]

Both Nimus' and Cramer's critiques (taken as an example of a broader trend) remain closer, at least in these texts, to the libertarian tradition with few accounts of the surplus-value extraction and macroeconomic forces behind intellectual property regimes (in any form: copyright, copyleft or CC). Alternatively, among Autonomist Marxists, a stronger critique is presented against the ideology implicitly pushed by Free Software, Creative Commons and other forms of *digital-only commonism*. For instance, political activist Martin Hardie believes that 'FLOSS currently resides within a particularly American vision of freedom which seems to be spreading virus-like in its quest to smooth the space of the globe'.[29] Hardie criticizes FLOSS precisely because it never questions its relations with the forces of production or the manner in which it is captured by capital.

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> The logic of FLOSS seems only to promise a new space for entrepreneurial freedom where we are never exploited or subject to others' command. The sole focus upon 'copyright freedom' sweeps away consideration of the processes of valorisation active within the global factory without walls. . . . FLOSS appears as a somewhat 'a-historical' form of freedom, in the sense that its logic locates its particular genealogy within a transcendental and ever present notion of foundational legal principle, rather than any material, historical or productive forces.[30]

Compared to Nimus, Hardie enlarges the *class composition* behind the IP battles into a broader global *corporate composition*. Real forces behind CC and Free Software do not simply belong to a new generation of reformist lawyers and NGOs, but specifically the ITC corporations whose business depends on the distributed 'factory without walls' of free developers.

> FSF legal counsel Eben Moglen, has commented upon what they envisage as the key to the GPL's success. He acknowledges that the lack of adversarial situations arising in respect of the GPL is in part because the large organisations which use the software are 'the major players building information technology systems' who 'understand the benefits from free software'. From this point of view the apparent force of law of the GPL receives its support not from legal principle or freedom, but from the very fact that major corporations involved in the ITC economy depend upon innovation and production occurring in a networked environment. Large corporations depend upon the existence of the factory without walls and the apparent force of law of the GPL is a result of its instrumentality in this environment.[31]

A tactical notion of *autonomous commons* can be imagined as encapsulating these new tendencies against the hyper-celebration of the Creative Commons political model and the extreme drift towards *digitalism* more generally. To provide a hypothetical schema or potential mapping, autonomous commons: 1) allows not only passive and personal consumption but a *productive* use of common stock – implying commercial use by single workers; 2) questions the role and *complicity* of the com-

mons within the global economy and places common stock out of the exploitation of large companies; 3) is aware of the *asymmetry* between immaterial and material commons and the impact of immaterial accumulation on material production (for instance IBM utilizing Linux); 4) considers the commons as an hybrid space that must be dynamically constructed and dynamically defended. As will become apparent later, the new commons (digital or otherwise) must be described as a tactical and contextual entity, as a multiple matrix of forces, and not simply an abstract space of friction-less freedom.

Towards the Autonomous Commons

In many critiques of Free Culture, there is a direct appeal for a tangible commons driven by a desire for more friction with the materiality of labour and the everyday economy. Among all the appeals for *consistent commons*, however, only Dmytri Kleiner's idea of a Copyfarleft license attempts to transform the core of the conflict into a pragmatic proposal and break the flat paradigm of Free Culture. In his article 'Copyfarleft and Copyjustright', Kleiner begins by noting a *property divide* that is more crucial and determining than any digital divide: 10 per cent of the world population owns 85 per cent of global assets against a multitude of people who own barely anything.[32] This material dominion of the proprietary class is actually extended as a result of copyright control over immaterial assets, so that digital objects can be owned, controlled and traded. In the case of music, for example, intellectual property is more significant today for the proprietary class of owners than for musicians, as cultural producers are often forced to resign control over their own works along with their rights as authors. In the hands of a musician, intellectual property is no longer the same thing when it is accumulated by a large corporation.[33] However, in many cases, the digital commons does not provide a better habitat for artists. Authors are generally sceptical that the copyleft solution can earn them a living. At the end of the day, the wage conditions of authors within cognitive capitalism seem to follow the same laws as a traditional industrial economy. On this point, many reasonable supporters of copyleft are ready to provide a long list of alternative and sustainable economic models that contemporary authors should follow to safeguard both personal income and free culture. Kleiner, on the contrary, looks at the question from a

more general perspective, framing it against the broader ecosystem of the contemporary capitalist economy. Moving from Ricardo's definition of rent (an income that the owner of a productive asset can earn just by owning it, not by doing anything) and the so-called 'Iron Law of Wages', Kleiner develops the 'iron law of copyright earnings'.[34]

> The system of private control of the means of publication, distribution, promotion and media production ensures that artists and all other creative workers can earn no more than their subsistence. Whether you are biochemist, a musician, a software engineer or a film-maker, you have signed over all your copyrights to property owners before these rights have any real financial value for no more than the reproduction costs of your work. This is what I call the Iron Law of Copyright Earnings.[35]

Kleiner recognizes that both copyright and copyleft regimes (and everything between like CC licenses) constantly keep workers' earnings below average sustainable requirements. In particular, copyleft does not assist either software developers or artists since it exclusively reallocates surplus and rent in favour of major corporations and the various owners of material infrastructural assets. Drawing up a balance sheet for the first decades of the copyleft movement, the rise of the Creative Commons model carried along the unexpected colonization of economic rent onto free cultural capital.

> Copyleft, as developed by the free software community, is thus not a viable option for most artists. Even for software developers, the iron law of wages applies, they may be able to earn a living, but nothing more, owners of property will still capture the full value of the product of their labour. Copyleft is thus not able to 'make society better' in any material sense, because not only is it not viable for many kinds of workers, but the majority of the extra exchange value created by producers of copyleft information is in every case captured by owners of material property.[36]

According to Kleiner, capital needed to move from a strict copyright regime to a *copy-just-right* regime (aka Creative Commons) to coopt the

energies of the copyleft movement and reintroduce a rent system on a molecular scale, just as capital extended rent across the collective intelligence of free software developers and kept them under an 'iron law of copyright earnings'.

> Thus, just as capital joined the copyleft software movement to reduce the cost of software development, capital is also joining the copyright dissident art movement to integrate filesharing and sampling into an otherwise property-based system of control. As copyleft does not allow the extraction of rent for the right to copy, and what owners of property want is not something that will challenge the property regime, but rather to create more categories and subcategories so that practices like filesharing and remixing can exist with the property regime. In other words, copyjustright. A more flexible version of copyright that can adapt to modern uses but still ultimately embody and protect the logic of control. The most prominent example of this is the so-called Creative Commons and it's myriad of 'just right' licenses. 'Some rights reserved,' the motto of the site says it all.[37]

Kleiner reaches a radical position: neither copyleft, copyright or copyjustright can overcome this iron law of copyright earnings and assist the real producers: the 'working class'. So why are we still arguing about alternative intellectual property licenses if they cannot help us? The solution for Kleiner is *copyfarleft*, a license with a hybrid status that recognizes class divisions and allows workers to claim back the means of production. Copyfarleft products are free, but can be used to make money only by those who do not exploit wage labour (like other workers or cooperatives).

> For copyleft to have any revolutionary potential it must be Copyfarleft. It must insist upon workers ownership of the means of production. In order to do this a license cannot have a single set of terms for all users, but rather must have different rules for different classes. Specifically one set of rules for those who are working within the context of workers ownership and commons based production, and another for those who employ private property and wage labour in production.[38]

In this model, those who exploit wage labour and private property on a large scale cannot use copyfarleft materials, but normal workers and producers can freely share and profit by applying their own labour to mutual property. For example: 'Under a copyfarleft license a worker-owned printing cooperative could be free to reproduce, distribute, and modify the common stock as they like, but a privately owned publishing company would be prevented from having free access.'[39] Copyfarleft is quite different from the 'non-commercial' use supported by some CC licences since they do not distinguish between *endogenic* (within the commons) commercial use and *exogenic* (outside the commons) commercial use. Both are forbidden. Kleiner suggests introducing an asymmetry: endogenic commercial use should be allowed while keeping exogenic capitalist use forbidden.

> A copyfarleft license must allow commons-based commercial use while denying the ability to profit by exploiting wage labour. The copyleft Non-Commercial approach does neither, it prevents commons-based commerce, while restricting wage exploitation only by requiring the exploiters to share some loot with the so-called original author. In no way does this overcome the iron law for either the authors or other workers. 'Non Commercial' is not a suitable way to describe the required endogenic/exogenic boundary. Yet, no other commons license exists that provides a suitable legal framework for commons-based producers to use. Only a license that effectively prevents alienated property and wage labour from being employed in the reproduction of the otherwise free information commons can change the distribution of wealth.[40]

Interestingly, this is the correct application of the original institution of the commons, which was strictly related to material production (even reiterating this characteristic in today's cultural debate sounds grotesque to many). The commons were land used by a specific community to harvest or breed their animals. If someone could not send cows to pasture and produce milk on it, it would not be considered a real commons. Kleiner argues that if money cannot be made from it, a cultural work does not belong to the commons: it is still private property.

The Poverty of Networks

After cultural artefacts, the next challenge for digitalism has been to apply the Free Software model to social production *tout court*. To concentrate on surplus can again demonstrate how, besides Free Culture, there is always an Ideology of Free Production. As Tiziana Terranova has clearly explained in her book *Network Culture*, Free Production is actually always sustained by a massive outlay of Free Labour:

> It is important to remember that the gift economy, as part of a larger digital economy, is itself an important force within the reproduction of the labor force in late capitalism as a whole. The provision of 'free labor' . . . is a fundamental moment in the creation of value in the digital economies.[41]

A testimony of this tendency is Yochai Benkler's book *The Wealth of Networks,* where he glorifies the rise of the Internet-based peer-to-peer anti-copyright movement of volunteers 'which is changing the world economy': he calls it *social production*.[42] In his account, labour exploitation, surplus accumulation and economic rent are always kept off the radar. Benkler, accordingly, claims that social production is good for business. Take the 'excellent example' of IBM that has been 'one of the firms most aggressively engaged in adapting its business model to the emergence of free software'.[43] On the other side of this profit margin, workers are invited to simply enjoy the success of Wikipedia. In this sense, Dmytri Kleiner has polemically entitled his review of Benkler 'The Poverty of Networks':

> The wealthy network exists within a context of a poor planet. The root of the problem of poverty does not lay in a lack of culture or information (though both are factors), but of direct exploitation of the producing class by the property owning classes. The source of poverty is not reproduction costs, but rather extracted economic rents, forcing the producers to accept less than the full product of their labour as their wage by denying them independent access to the means of production.[44]

As the previous paragraphs have tried to show, the central issue is to critically unveil the asymmetries of the real economy, the breaking point between the digital and material domain, the parasitic relation

accumulating and distributing material wealth in real life. In Benkler's scenario, the information commons appears as a friction-less roundabout pivoting on a gigantic greased engine that nevertheless remains constantly censored and beyond critique. Even here, the commons that Benkler constantly mentions are purely digital domains – that is, these fictional commons have no relation with the actual potential of real productive commons. In Marxist terms, Kleiner observes that if there are no reproduction costs but a free exchange of free digital copies, it is impossible to gain an exchange-value to acquire material goods.

> If commons-based peer-production is limited exclusively to a commons made of digital property with virtual no reproduction costs then how can the use-value produced be translated into exchange-value? Something with no reproduction costs can have no exchange-value in a context of free exchange. Further, unless it can be converted into exchange-value, how can the peer producers be able to acquire the material needs for their own subsistence?[45]

Actually, exchange-value exists, but it is produced along with the rent applied over the material infrastructure and the virtual spaces of the commons (the Internet itself, the tons of hardware around us, the proprietary social networks, the online advertisement, etcetera). According to Kleiner, through the notion of social production, Benkler offers another alibi to the private sector for exploiting the immaterial commons and giving nothing back in return.

> Whatever exchange value is derived from the information commons will always be captured by owners of real property, which lays outside the commons. For Social Production to have any effect on general material wealth it has to operate within the context of a total system of goods and services, where the physical means of production and the virtual means of production are both available in the commons for peer production. By establishing the idea of commons-based peer-production in the context of an information-only commons, Benkler is giving the peer-to-peer economy, or the competitive sector, yet anther way to create wealth for appropriation by the property privilege economy, or the monopoly sectors.[46]

Within the business community, Benkler's vision has been criticized by the pragmatic prophecy of Nicholas Carr in terms of the imminent monetization of Internet-based peer production: amateurs and volunteers will be soon paid in cash to produce content.[47] An awareness of the parasitic dimension of the Internet is just beginning. The following chapters will demonstrate how the new theory of rent developed from the theoretical tradition of Autonomist Marxism can be useful for unveiling the illusions of techno-ideology and fully understanding the role of the immaterial or technological parasitism. In doing so, however, we should always remember that Marxism can be misused to promote a digital-only 'social revolution', and that radical thought itself can become a playground for the digitalist agenda.

A Parasite Haunting the Hacker Haunting the World

A Hacker Manifesto by McKenzie Wark is a remarkable attempt to develop a Marxist critique of the information society and the digital economy.[48] Wark, nevertheless, still remains trapped in a form of digitalism. Here, the term *hacker class* is introduced as an attempt to synthesize Marxist thought and the new autonomous movements of Internet-based workers and activists, traditionally allergic to any kind of Marxism especially in the Anglo-American context. 'Hacker class' is the *Californian* translation of all those continental terms, like immaterial workers, cognitariat, multitude and so on, that have descended from the older Marxist concept of the general intellect. Wark's hacker class is, therefore, specifically defined by the power of *abstraction* (the ability to shape new ideas, or the creative act) rather than the living labour or cooperation between brains found in the Autonomist Marxism of Negri, Lazzarato or Virno.

> All classes fear this relentless abstraction of the world, on which their fortunes yet depend. All classes but one: the hacker class. We are the hackers of abstraction. We produce new concepts, new perceptions, new sensations, hacked out of raw data. Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colorings, we are the abstracters of new worlds.[49]

Despite an avant-garde style that resembles Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, the theoretical core of the book is actually the crisis of property.

Wark believes that the hacker class can reopen the question of property more effectively than any previous social struggle. Surprisingly, he does not make any distinction between material and immaterial property: property on signs and ideas, as opposed to property on material goods or biochemical energy. Wark believes implicitly that the free reproducibility of *digital* data will eventually undermine *material* property itself. A soft Marxism defines the hacker class: where Marx proposes the abolition of private property and the re-appropriation of the means of production as a revolutionary solution, here, there is only the gesture of the gift as a silent rebellion. The gift economy is advanced as the real threat to the property system and to the power of the 'vectorial class' (the class owning the media infrastructure), precisely as P2P networks are undermining the music and movie industries. Yet this form of sabotage remains predominantly digital.

The declarative style of the book is principally locked in a binary scheme. Wark does not recognize that capitalism has already found a third way and many business models are already based on the 'gift economy' (IBM parasiting Free Software, Google providing free services, etcetera). On the contrary, Wark believes that the 'vectorial' class is still committed to a reactive concept of scarcity and has not repositioned itself into a more competitive scenario, where the notion of property itself has become more dynamic and negotiated. Squeezing a Marxian messianic narrative into the matrix, Wark believes that the vectorialist class will be erased by the 'contradiction' that it assisted building: the Internet. In other words, the endless reproduction of desire (Deleuze and Guattari stretched out again!) triggered by digital media cannot be fatally stopped.

> But short of seizing hold of a monopoly on all vectors for producing and distributing information, the vectorialist class cannot entirely limit the free productivity of the hacker class, which continues to produce yet more fuel for the free productivity of desire.[50]

In a specific chapter, Wark attempts to connect the question of property to the notion of surplus. Even here, he refers implicitly to *digital surplus* alone and to the low-cost monodimensional reproduction of bits. He makes no distinction between digital surplus and the concepts of sur-

plus value in Marx or excess in Bataille; even if Wark alludes to Bataille within the text: 'The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance, the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.'[51] Can the wild nature of Bataille seriously grow out over the network? As noted at the beginning of this text, the energy of digital flows is not equivalent to that of material flows and this misunderstanding should not be maintained any longer. If in Bataille energy excess fuels the economy, and specifically its dark sides, many scholars continue to fetishize an overly abstract and finally undisruptive conception of such excess.

> The hack produces both a useful and a useless surplus. The useful surplus goes into expanding the realm of freedom wrested from necessity. The useless surplus is the surplus of freedom itself, the margin of free production unconstrained by production for necessity. As the surplus in general expands, so too does the possibility of expanding its useless portion, out of which the possibility of hacking beyond the existing forms of property will arise.[52]

Without resolving the question of surplus, and the cognitive and technological rent fuelled by the hacker class, Wark fails in developing a consistent political paradigm. Wark believes that the conflict between the vectorialist and hacker class is real and that 'abstraction', the knowledge accumulated by the hacker class, is the contested issue.[53] However, such a willing conflict only operates on the immaterial level, with no acknowledgement of the material parasite operating from outside the digital sphere directly *on* such a conflict. The struggle of the hacker class appears as a videogame played on the incorporeal vectors of the Internet and paid for by the global working class. Interestingly, on this point, Wark advances the hacker class as a legitimate political model for the farming and working class themselves; however, keeping in mind the criticism against Free Culture, it is clear that digital commons are unable to produce and organize wealth equivalent to the original commons (that were at least productive of milk, meat, cereals, etcetera):

> What the farming, working and hacking classes have in common is an interest in abstracting production from its subordination to ruling

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classes who turn production into the production of new necessities, who wrest slavery from surplus. What the farming and working class lack in a direct knowledge of free production the hacking class has from direct experience. What the hacking class lacks is the depths of an historic class memory of revolt against alienated production. This is what the farming and working classes have in spades.[54]

Following Serres and his bucolic stories, the farming class seems significantly more appealing as a political avant-garde with its robust notion of the commons. Moreover, in light of the current energy crisis and related hysterias, the information society is evidently going to lose its priority on the collective agenda. Climate change, energy resources and food production are becoming the political issues of the present and media culture is already being reshaped on a less digital and more dystopian basis. Perhaps *bioenergy* will become the central paradigm instead of *biocode*. From this perspective, Wark opens his book to an allusion that arrives too late: 'A double spooks the world, the double of abstraction.' Behind digital abstraction and economic neoarchaism, a parallel evolution is already taking place in the interstitials of media ecologies. The next section will show how parasites grow stronger under cognitive capitalism. Indeed, 'a parasite is haunting the hacker haunting the world'.

Rent: The Dystopian Parasite of Cognitive Capitalism

Rent is the New Profit

How does cognitive capitalism make money? Where is surplus extracted and allocated in a digital economy? While the late public of digerati and activists are stuck to the glorification of 'free' and 'peer' production, good managers – and also good Marxists – are totally aware of the profits made on the shoulders of the collective intelligence. The school of post-Operaismo, for instance, has a dystopian vision of the *general intellect* produced by post-Fordist workers and the digital multitudes: the accumulation of collective knowledge is potentially liberating but constantly absorbed before becoming a true form of social autonomy. Since the 1960s, the ontology of Italian Autonomia has always foreground the innovative force of the working class, in contrast with Anglo-American Marxism which preferred to recognize capital as the primary social driving force and the working class as merely a prosthesis or structural effect.[1] In a similar way, the network is celebrated by *freeculturalists* as an innovative force in itself, with no particular social subject prior to it. On closer analysis, however, network culture itself belongs to the last stage of a long process of the socialization of knowledge and education, begun after the Second World War and evolving into the post-Fordist factory, crossing the counter-cultures of the 1960s and then the pioneering hacker movement: a collective and social process, built up gradually, that has now reached its entropic turn. While initiated as an autonomous movement, in the end, network-based cooperation has not improved the life conditions of most digital workers. Online 'free labour', for instance, appears to be far more dominant than the 'wealth of networks'. A further insight is needed to understand clearly how surplus is distributed through networks and who benefits from it.

Traditional economics and the new schemes submitted by the supporters of Free Culture and peer production provide only a partial understanding of the digital economy, as they focus on the alleged virtuosity and autonomy of the network form. However, the theory of rent recently advanced by post-Operaismo reveals the parasitic dimension of cognitive capitalism from a much clearer perspective. Autonomist

Marxism has become renowned for shaping a new toolbox of political concepts for late capitalism (such as Empire, multitude, immaterial labour, biopolitical production, and so on). In an article published in November 2007 in *Posse* magazine, Negri and Vercellone go a step further: they establish rent as the central mechanism of the contemporary economy, and illuminate a new field of antagonism in the process.[2] Traditionally, Autonomist Marxism has focussed on the transformations of labour conditions (following the evolution of post-Fordism), rather than the new parasitic modes of surplus extraction. In classical economic theory, rent is distinguished from profit. Rent is the *parasitic* income an owner can earn just by possessing an asset and is traditionally associated with land property. Profit, on the other hand, is meant to be *productive* and is associated with the power of capital to generate and extract surplus (from commodity value and the workforce). As Vercellone explains in a previous study:

> According to a widespread opinion in Marxian theory that stems from Ricardo's political economy, rent is a pre-capitalist inheritance and an obstacle to the progressive movement of capital's accumulation. On this premise, real, pure, and efficient capitalism is capitalism with no rent.[3]

Vercellone criticizes the idea of a 'good productive capitalism' by highlighting the becoming rent of profit as the central trait of the contemporary economy: beyond the hype of technological innovation and the 'creative economy', the whole of capitalism is breeding a subterranean parasitic nature. Vercellone, accordingly, provides an apt slogan for the nature of cognitive capitalism: 'Rent is the new profit'. Rent is parasitic because it is orthogonal to the line of classic profit. *Parasite* etymologically means 'eating at another's table,' sucking surplus in a furtive manner, rather than directly. Whenever we produce freely in front of our computers, somebody has their hands in our wallet.

Post-Operaismo has developed the theory of rent by upgrading Marx's notion of the general intellect. If in Marx the general intellect was embodied in the fixed capital of machinery, today knowledge producing value is rooted in the distributed cooperation of brains that exceeds the boundaries of the factory. Profit is to the Fordist factory as rent

is to the diffuse 'social factory'.[4] Contrary to the theory of information revolution and network society, Vercellone claims that the mutation of labour cannot be explained by the technological determinism of ICT. The power of ICT does not originate from the vitalistic force of capitalism, but from the social networks of knowledge that are prior to any technology. Cognitive capitalism emerges later in the form of a parasite: it subjects social knowledge and inhibits its emancipatory potential. Rent is the other side of the commons – it was once cast over the common land, today over the network commons.

The becoming rent of profit means a transformation of management structures and the cognitive workforce. Not surprisingly, the autonomization of capital has grown in parallel with the autonomization of cooperation. Managers now deal increasingly with financial and speculative tasks, while workers are in charge of distributed management. In this evolution, the 'cognitariat' is split into two tendencies. On one side, high-skilled cognitive workers become 'functionaries of the capital rent' and are co-opted within this system through stock options (a parasitic type of wage that partially absorbs the worker into proprietary capital itself).[5] On the other side, the majority of workers face a declassing (*déclassement*) of life conditions despite their skills being increasingly knowledge rich. It is no mystery that the New Economy has generated more McJobs: temp-workers are proliferating coincidently with the rise of the 'wealth of networks'. Production went social, but wages are still trapped within the cage of labour as the only access to income. The effect is a stagnation of income and the precarization of labour, while rent accumulates energy on a parallel level. This model can be easily applied to the Internet economy and its *workforce*, where users are placed in charge of content production and web management, but do not share any profit. Major corporations like Google, for instance, make money over the attention economy of user-generated content with its services Adsense and Adwords. Google provides a light infrastructure for advertising that infiltrates websites as a subtle and mono-dimensional parasite, extracting profit without producing any content. Of course, a small part of the value is shared with users, and Google programmers are paid in stock options to develop more sophisticated algorithms, so we are placed in the belly of a benevolent parasite; to a certain degree, it is still comforting and paternalistic.

In this interweaving scenario, Negri and Vercellone advocate the final collapse of Marx's trinitarian formula of profit, rent and wages. For them, rent is the new antagonism between capital and labour in the age of the general intellect. The theory of rent, therefore, at last opens to the actual multiplicity of late capitalism and its molecular strategies of valorization, since there are heterogeneous kinds of rent at work concerning finance, real estate, knowledge, wages, and so forth. Moreover, according to the 'emergence of immaterial labour' outlined by Negri and Hardt in *Empire*, cognitive labour lies at the centre of the valorization process and, consequently, can break the mechanisms of capitalist production more easily.[6] Along this conceptual line, however, the notion of multitude has been kept rooted by its own production force, but with few strategies of self-defence. The theory of rent finally illuminates the new fields of conflict and sabotage in terms of value accumulation, which become crucial for producing and defending the new commons.

Rent is the Other Side of the Commons

If the central axis of valorization is the 'expropriation of the commons through the rent' within cognitive capitalism, a key tendency is clearly the transformation of common knowledge into a commodity. For Negri and Vercellone, this explains the ongoing pressure for a stronger Intellectual Property regime: copyright is one of the strategic evolutions of rent to expropriate the commons and reintroduce artificial scarcity. Real estate and financial rent are usually referred to as central examples: they played a major role in the twentieth-century speculation crises and, conversely, in the dismantling of the welfare state. Today, according to Negri and Vercellone as well as many other authors, speculation is directed towards intellectual property, forcing artificial costs on cognitive goods that can paradoxically be reproduced or copied virtually for free. Yet post-Fordist rent enters a complex scenario, with multiple ways of exploiting capital, along with more advanced strategies of targeting new types and spaces of the commons, many of which are beyond the scope of Negri and Vercellone's analysis.

The composite case of intellectual property must be examined, as rent may not necessarily arise from the new knowledge enclosures, but also from the exploitation of a common cognitive space. Here, an initial

clarification must be established regarding the different nature of patents, copyrights and trademarks. Patents are *machinic*, they are used to produce new commodities, to organize the workforce, to control other machines and generate profit exponentially. They represent a dense concretion of machinic knowledge (*cognitive labour*) and, as a consequence, must be kept as an industry secret. Alternatively, a cultural artefact protected by copyright like music, for instance, is a reproducible commodity for the widest audience (*immaterial consumption*): its valorization follows the laws of celebrity and so it needs to be multiplied as much as possible. However, the exchange-value of popular music products has been felt vertically in the digital age, as multiplication has run out of control. Maintaining rent over the intellectual property of music is no longer easy and the music industries have had to change their strategies, turning to live events and non-reproducible entities. Additionally, software programs cover both realms, as a *becoming-immaterial* of machines. They are both machinic and easily reproducible, yet they require hardware to function and a material world to interface. Even proprietary programs are occasionally left to be reproduced 'out of control' to establish new standardized monopolies or a dominant market position for a specific hardware device. For Free Software, on the other hand, a hybrid strategy has always been advanced: the program is free, the manual is not. Finally, trademarks operate to simply protect a brand, but their value relies on the largest possible exposure (in response, avant-garde activism has developed *meta-brands* precisely to subvert the immaterial rent of the brand economy).[7] This very brief overview of the digital economy demonstrates how different types of rent have respectively risen from patents, copyrights or trademarks following different evolutions and strategies, where material conditions still play an invisible yet essential role. Interestingly, political battles are fought by *freeculturalists* around software patents, but not so much around *hardware patents* (and there is not the same pressure on 'wetware' monopolies, such as pharmaceutical patents). Open Source Hardware, for instance, receives almost no media attention. Indeed, digitalists like Stallman are not interested at all in machinery, having explicitly proclaimed: 'I see no social imperative for free hardware designs like the imperative for free software.'[8] In the meantime, rent is constantly gnawing away on its cheese, hidden in a dark corner.

Markets need constant expansion. Digital technologies have opened new dynamic spaces and broad networks to apply rent in novel ways, specifically on the infrastructure that makes digital communication and free reproducibility possible. New forms of rent are increasingly generated from this property-commons dialectic, such as the rent over the attention economy of web advertising or the rent of ICT companies over Internet bandwidth. Rent, more so than private property, is the flipside of the knowledge commons. So who is the enemy of the commons? The question deeply affects the current political stakes if the answer is property or rent. The traditional anti-copyright movement is inclined to work solely from the first option. Indeed, exceeding the paradigms of Free Culture, rent does not even care about maintaining the status of private property. As the digital economy threatens the status quo of property, rent does not ask for a stronger Intellectual Property regime, but simply moves forward and adapts itself to this dynamic space, for instance, by establishing alliances with the Free Software movement and Creative Commons. Rent becomes rent over a flow, 'property' of a speed differential. Financial markets are the most radical example of this virtualization of value: in stock exchange circuits, money accelerates its semiotic nature towards the monetization of future events.[9] If Vercellone detected the becoming rent of profit, I advance the idea that property is becoming fluid, monopolies are becoming temporary and rent grows on speed differentials and dynamic spaces. A further complex matrix is running out there.

The Fourth Dimension of Cognitive Capitalism

The digital revolution made the reproduction of immaterial objects easier, faster, ubiquitous and almost free. However, as the Italian economist Enzo Rullani points out, within cognitive capitalism: 'Proprietary logic does not disappear but has to subordinate itself to the law of diffusion.'[10] Intellectual property (and so rent) is no longer based on space and objects, but on time and speed. Besides copyright, there are many other modes to extract rent. In his book *Economia della conoscenza*, Rullani discusses how easily reproducible cognitive products must immediately undergo a process of diffusion in order to maintain a degree of control or ownership.[11] Since an entropic tendency affects any cognitive product, it is not recommended to invest in static proprietary rent. In

actuality, there is a rent produced on the multiplication of uses and a rent produced on the monopoly of a secret. These are two opposite strategies: the former is recommended for cultural products like music, the latter for patents. Rullani is inclined to suggest that free multiplication is a vital strategy within cognitive capitalism, as the value of knowledge is fragile and tends to rapidly decline. Immaterial commodities (that populate any spectacular, symbolic, affective, cognitive space) suffer a strong entropic decay of meaning. At the end of the curve of diffusion, banality is waiting for any meme, especially in today's emotional market, which is constantly searching for unique or singular experiences.

Rullani, therefore, provides an expanded and detailed description of a cognitive capitalism that is often described in generic terms. For Rullani, the value of knowledge (extensively of any cognitive product, artwork, brand, information) is given by the composition of three drivers: the value of its performance and application (v); the number of its multiplications and replica (n); the sharing rate of the value among the people involved in the process (p). With a bit of mathematics, the economic value of knowledge is less mysterious, pragmatically described by a formula: $V = v, n, p$. Knowledge is successful when it becomes self-propulsive and pushes all these three forces: 1) maximizing the value, 2) multiplying effectively, and 3) sharing the value that is produced. Of course, in a dynamic scenario, a compromise between the three drivers is necessary, as they are interrelated and competitive: if only one improves, the others get worse. Furthermore, to control, accelerate or slow down a driver, there are three different types of mediators: interpretative, multiplicative and institutional. For example, Creative Commons licenses may be considered both multiplicative and institutional mediators: they extend the uses of a work as far as possible by protecting it from unwanted applications, but they rely on the strength of legal institutions (also, without reallocating value, by the way). Rullani's model is fascinating precisely because intellectual property has no central role in extracting surplus: in other words, rent is applied strategically and dynamically across the three trajectories, along different regimes of intellectual property. Knowledge is, therefore, projected into a less fictional cyberspace, a sort of invisible material landscape, where cognitive competition can only be described by new space-time coordinates.[12] Rullani, therefore, describes his model as three-dimensional, but

it could more accurately be considered as four-dimensional, since it also includes time. As the financial markets constantly illustrate, rent valorization often has the nature of a temporal gap.

The cognitive economy is strictly related to time, if only because knowledge remains an irreversible and dissipative process. Knowledge curves temporal registers: yesterday's production techniques are irreversibly changed by today's innovations. Time, therefore, becomes the competitive arena of valorization:

> The faster the entropic decline of knowledge (or the chance to lose its proprietary control), the faster its propagation must be. . . . All the actors of knowledge economy are engaged in a *race against time*, where running is necessary simply to maintain the same position and not fall behind.[13]

Within cognitive capitalism, a monopolistic rent is applied along temporal coordinates. The initial position establishes a monopoly: the first model of a MP3 player, the initial book on a given topic, the pioneering piece of software and so on. Value is a matter of good timing: not too early, not too late, at a proper rate of dissemination. Similar to fashion, rent is applied through a provisional hegemony along a temporal coordinate.

Meanwhile, knowledge changes the context of distribution, continuously transforming and expanding its immaterial space. Knowledge is produced in an original context ß, and then applied to a final context ß, and disseminated throughout all the points between. Knowledge (and any new form of technology) produces new social spaces that are later populated and monopolized as they reach a critical density. The Internet, for example, is a stratification of different spaces and flows, each dominated by a differential density of technology, communication, interaction and content. These various domains (produced by a new software application, an innovative commercial service, a spontaneous social network, etcetera) provide an arena for both the new commons and for new types of rent.

The dynamic model provided by Rullani is more interesting than, for instance, Benkler's rather plain notion of 'social production', but it is not yet utilized by radical criticism and activism. In Rullani's per-

spective, material conditions cannot simply be replaced by immaterial production, despite the hypertrophy of digital enthusiasm. There is a general misconception that the cognitive economy is an autonomous and virtuous space. On the contrary, according to Rullani, knowledge exists only through *material vectors*. The nodal point represents the friction between the free reproducibility of knowledge and the non-reproducibility of the material. The immaterial generates value only if it grants meaning through a material process. A music recording on CD, for example, has to be physically produced and consumed. We need our body and especially our time to produce and consume music. And when the CD vector is dematerialized thanks to developments in digital media reproducibility and P2P networks, the body of the artist is forced into a more competitive situation. Have digital media galvanized more competition or cooperation? This is a key question for critical Internet theory today.

A Taxonomy of Immaterial Parasites

In order to describe cognitive capitalism in detail, a detailed taxonomy of the immaterial parasites of rent is required. In this case, taxonomy is not merely used as a metaphor, since cognitive systems tend to behave like living systems, continually producing greater forms of biodiversity.[14] While Vercellone describes cognitive rent as a particular technique of extraction maintained by intellectual property (patents, copyrights and trademarks), Rullani contextualizes these new forms of rent as a situation based on competition and speed. He demonstrates how rent can be extracted dynamically along very mobile and temporary micromonopolies, skipping the limits of intellectual property regimes.

In either case, the possibility of cognitive rent is strictly determined by the technological substratum. Digital technologies have opened new spaces of communication, socialization and cooperation that are only virtually 'free'. The surplus extraction is channelled generously through the material infrastructure needed to sustain an immaterial 'Second Life'. Technological rent is the fee applied on the ICT infrastructures when they establish a monopoly on media, bandwidth, protocols, standards, software or virtual spaces (including recent social networks like MySpace and Facebook, for instance).[15] Technological rent is, therefore,

composed of many different layers: from the materiality of the hardware and electricity to the immateriality of the software running a server, a blog or an online community. Technological rent is fed by general consumption and social communication, by P2P networks and 'free' reproducibility, along with all the activism of Free Culture. Technological rent is different from cognitive rent, as it is based on the exploitation of (material and immaterial) spaces and not only knowledge. Similarly, the attention economy can be described as a rent on attention applied to the limited resource of the consumer time-space.[16] In the society of pervasive media and the spectacle, the attention economy is responsible for commodity valorization to a significant degree. The attention time of consumers is like a limited piece of land that is constantly under dispute. Technological rent is, finally, the central element of the energetic metabolism sustaining the techno-macroparasite.

It is well known today how the dream of the new economy was a driver for the financial rent over stock markets that eventually led to the dot-com crash. The bubble exploited a spiral of virtual valorization channelled across the Internet, through the hype produced by new spaces of communication and an accelerated competition that forced start-ups out of any realistic business plan. Similarly, financialization has become the first vector used to parasite domestic savings.[17] Wages are now directly enslaved by a rent mechanism: workers are given stock options as a part of their fee, fatally co-opting them into the destiny of proprietary capital. Besides financialization, the fundamental concept of land rent has also been updated by cognitive capitalism. As the relation between the artistic underground and gentrification demonstrates, real-estate speculation is strictly related to the 'collective symbolic capital' of a given physical place (as defined by David Harvey in his essay 'The Art of Rent').[18] Land rent becomes profitable through symbolic capital, as in major urban centres where the scarcity of land is valorized by the symbolic dimension and no longer through physical necessity. Today, both historical symbolic capital (as in the case of Berlin or Barcelona) and artificial symbolic capital (like that in Richard Florida's 'creative cities' marketing campaigns) are used for real-estate speculation on a massive scale.

All these forms of rent represent immaterial parasites. The parasite is *immaterial* since the rent is produced dynamically along the virtual

extensions of space, time, communication, imagination and desire. The parasite is, however, is doubly *material* as the value is transmitted through vectors such as media and commodities in the case of cognitive and attention rent; infrastructure in the case of technological rent; real estate in the case of the speculation on symbolic capital, and so on (financial speculation only appears virtually as a dematerialized machine of value, since its material consequences are actualized in time sooner or later). The awareness of this parasitic dimension of technology should eventually inaugurate the decline of the old digitalist *media culture* in favour of a new *dystopian cult* of the techno-parasite.

The Bicephalous Multitude and the Grammar of Sabotage

Many of the subcultures and political schools that have emerged around knowledge and network paradigms have not adequately acknowledged cognitive capitalism as a conflict-ridden and competitive scenario. Paolo Virno, as discussed in the preceding chapter, is one of the few critical thinkers to underline this dystopian ambivalence of the multitude, whose nature is cooperative as well as aggressive.[19] The *Bildung* of an autonomous network is not immediate or straightforward. As Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter put it: 'Networks thrive on diversity and conflict (the *notworking*), not on unity, and this is what community theorists are unable to reflect upon.'[20]

Cooperation and collective intelligence have their own grey areas, especially in terms of the passivity that dominates online everyday life, as Lovink and Rossiter point out. It is likely there are other diseases intrinsic to network societies. Can digitalism itself be considered a sort of psychopathology of the collective mind; an autistic desire for a parallel universe without conflict, friction and gravity? The term 'psychopathology' is not derogatory, but is used to underline how our controversial and fluid relation with technology is open to different becomings. Digitalism can be described as a sublimation of the collective desire for a pure space and, at the same time, as the obscure accomplice of a parasitic megamachine.

A new theory of the negative must be established around the missing political link of digital culture: its disengagement with materiality and its uncooperative nature. Networks and cooperation do not always fit each other. Geert Lovink and Christopher Spehr ask more specifically:

when do networks stop functioning? How do people begin to un-coop-
erate? Freedom of refusal and not-working are advanced by Lovink and
Spehr as the very foundation of any collaborative effort (with an echo of
the Autonomist *refusal to work* and the concept of exodus).

> Spehr's key concept is that everyone should have the freedom to dis-
> solve collaboration at any given time. . . . The option to bail out is the
> sovereign act of network users. Notworking is their a priori, the very
> foundation all online activities are built upon. If you do not know
> how to log out, you're locked in. . . . Key to our effort to theorize indi-
> vidual and collective experiences, is the recognition that there must
> be a freedom to refuse to collaborate. There must be a constitutive
> exit strategy.[21]

Free uncooperation is the negative inverse ontology of *free cooperation* and
may provide the missing link that unveils the relation with the consen-
sual parasite. Moreover, the right to sabotage should also be included
within the notion of uncooperation, if only to finally clarify the indi-
vidualistic and private gesture of 'illegal' file sharing. The Creative Com-
mons discourse, for instance, is concerned primarily about the *legal* sta-
tus of digital file sharing and its possible copyright infringement – the
political dimension of the sabotage of intellectual property revenues and
capital accumulation affecting large media corporations is too prob-
lematic to be publicly confronted. Obfuscated by the ideology of the
Free, a new toolbox is needed to see clearly beyond the age of the digital
screen. If the positive gesture of cooperation has been overextended,
made banal and digitalized as a neutral act, only a new definition of
sabotage fits the political space specular to the neo-parasite of rent. If
profit has taken the impersonal form of rent, its social by-product is a
form of immaterial vandalism and anonymous sabotage. A new theory
of rent demands a new theory of resistance, before pursuing any discus-
sion of organizational forms, as rent changed largely the coordinates
and forms of exploitation. What kind of sabotage is the new 'social fac-
tory' affected by? Under cognitive capitalism, competition is said to be
more intense, but for precisely the same reason, sabotage is easier, as the
relation between the immaterial (value) and the material (goods) has
become even more fragile.

The indefinite multitude of online users is learning a very simple grammar of sabotage against capital and its concrete revenues, but for the first time along the conflict between material and immaterial. To describe the empty gesture of downloading the latest Hollywood blockbuster as Free Culture sounds rather like armchair activism. Labelling it as the sabotage of Hollywood capital accumulation may open up a more interesting perspective. However, if radical culture is established through real conflicts, then a more direct question can be posed: does 'good' digital piracy produce conflict, or does it simply sell more hardware and bandwidth? Is piracy an effective venture against real accumulation or does it help other kinds of rent accumulation? Alongside any digital *commonism*, accumulation still operates. Nevertheless, within the current hype, there is no room for a critical approach or a negative tendency. The pervasive density of digital networks and computer-based immaterial labour is not suspected of bringing about any significant countereffect. Maybe, as Marx pointed out in the 'Fragment on Machines', a larger dominion of the (digital) machinery may simply bring about entropy within capitalist accumulation.[22] A shadow of doubt remains: is the digital and knowledge economy simply slowing down capitalism, rather than fulfilling the self-organization of the general intellect of the multitudes? The two processes might be influencing each other.

Critical points of capitalist accumulation, however, can be found beyond the cognitive rent of the music and film corporations. The previous taxonomy of cognitive parasites reveals how symbolic and immaterial rent influences everyday life on different levels. The displaced multitudes of the global cities, for instance, are beginning to understand how gentrification is related to the new forms of cultural production and symbolic capital. In the novel *Millennium People*, Ballard prophetically described public riots originating within the middle class and targeting cultural institutions like the National Film Theatre in London. While less fictional and violent, new tensions are rising today in East London against the urban renovation in preparation of the 2012 Olympics. In recent years in Barcelona, a significant movement has been fighting against the gentrification of the former industrial district Poble Nou following the 22@ plan for a 'knowledge-based society'.[23] Similarly, in East Berlin the Media Spree project is attempting to attract

big media companies and 'creative class' in an area widely renowned for its cultural underground.[24] It is no coincidence then the Kafkaesque saga of Andrej Holm – an academic researcher at Humboldt University – who was arrested in July 2007 and accused of terrorism because of his research on gentrification in Germany.[25] As real-estate speculation is one of the leading forces of parasitic capitalism, these types of struggles and their connections with cultural production are far more interesting than any Free Culture agenda for revealing a concrete terrain of action.

The link between symbolic capital and material valorization is symptomatic of a phenomenon which digitalists are not able to identify or describe. The constitution of autonomous and productive new commons does not pass through traditional forms of activism, and certainly not through digital-only modes of resistance or online knowledge-sharing. The commons should be acknowledged as a hybrid space that is constantly configured through the friction between material and immaterial dimensions. If the commons becomes a dynamic space, it must be defended in an equally dynamic way. Due to the immateriality and anonymity of rent, a grammar of sabotage can be the only *modus operandi* of the multitudes trapped within network societies and cognitive capitalism. The sabotage of the immaterial value accumulation (that has indeed very material and productive consequences) is the only possible gesture specular to rent – it is the only possible gesture to build and defend the new commons.

Chapter III

The Hydra of Language:
The Biomorphic Unconscious of
Culture Industry

Finally, the most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the discipline of communication, seized hold of the word *concept* itself and said: 'This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the *ideas men!* We are the friends of the concept, we put it in our computers.' Information and creativity, concept and enterprise: there is already an abundant bibliography. . . . Philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced Critique with sales promotion. . . . How could philosophy, an old person, compete against young executives in a race for the universals of communication for determining the marketable form of the concept, *Merz?* Certainly, it is painful to learn that *Concept* indicates a society of information services and engineering. But the more philosophy comes up against shameless and inane rivals and encounters them at its very core, the more it feels driven to fulfil the task of creating concepts that are aerolites rather than commercial products.
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

Immaterial Civil War: Prototypes of Conflict within Cognitive Capitalism

> We are implicit, here, all of us, in a vast physical construct of artificially linked nervous systems. Invisible. We cannot touch it.
> William Gibson, "In the visegrips of Dr. Satan"[1]

> Conflict is not a commodity. On the contrary, commodity is above all conflict.
> *guerrigliamarketing.it*[2]

My Creativity Is My Conflict

Around 2006, the term Creative Industries (CI) started to surface in the mailboxes and mailing lists of many cultural workers, artists, activists and researchers across Europe, as well as in the calls for seminars and events. One of the points of condensation of this trend was the conference 'MyCreativity' held in Amsterdam by the Institute of Network Cultures.[3] An old question spins back: curiously, for the first time, a term is picked up from institutional jargon and brought unchanged into *alt* culture, a debate used to other keywords and post-structures (that may deserve an acronym as well) such as network culture (NC), knowledge economy (KE), immaterial labour (IL), general intellect (GI), and of course largely dominated by the two hegemonic models of Free Software (FLOSS) and Creative Commons (the famous CC). This interest in the topic of Creative Industries was more a reaction to the hype of Richard Florida's 'creative economy' storming European institutions and local city councils. Indeed, the notion of Creative Industries was far more pragmatic and understated than Florida's 'flight of the creative class'.[4] Originally, the precise 1998 definition adopted by the Creative Industries Task Force set up by Tony Blair stated: 'Those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'[5] The celebrated notion of 'social creativity' was largely left out of that definition, even if today the two terms Creative Industries and Creative Economy increasingly overlap. After so many years, Tony Blair is still suspected of stealing your ideas.

So let's try another back story to see how Creative Industries and Creative Economy also took over the stage of critical theory.

First, there is a European 'continental' genealogy. In their 1944 book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer shaped the concept of 'cultural industry' as a form of 'mass deception'.[6] In that case, European fascism was used as a model for American commodification: the new totalitarianism of mass culture following Nazi totalitarianism. In 1964, at a different latitude, the Austrian-French philosopher André Gorz outlined the figure of the 'scientific worker' in his book *Stratégie ouvrière et néocapitalisme* (quoted then by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*).[7] In the same year, still fighting against the prison of the Fordist factory, Italian Operaismo rediscovered the 'fragment on machines' from Marx's *Grundrisse* and his notion of *general intellect* in a seminal issue of *Quaderni Rossi*.[8] To name another important source, it is worth noting Ferruccio Rossi-Landi's book *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* [Language as a labour and market] dated 1973.[9] However, the *kairos* was not still fully mature for a public recognition of these notions of 'knowledge workers'. Not until the early 1990s, when Fordism was without doubt no longer the hegemonic mode of production in Western countries, could Italian post-Operaist thought clearly articulate the concepts of immaterial labour and *cognitariat* as the emerging forms of production, but also of the autonomous power of the multitudes (see the works of authors such as Negri, Lazzarato, Virno, Marazzi and Berardi). Operaismo developed its post-Fordist turn around magazines like the Italian *Luogo Comune*[10] and the French *Futur Antérieur*.[11] In the same period, Pierre Lévy was promoting 'collective intelligence' and the 'technologies of intelligence', profoundly inspired by the emerging digital networks.[12] This undercurrent of a new politics based on knowledge and the emerging social figure of the immaterial worker crossed the whole decade of the 1990s, at least in Italy and France. In 1999, the influential journal *Derive Approdi* published the manifesto 'Immaterial Workers of the World',[13] written mainly by Paolo Virno. Books like Lazzarato's *Lavoro* immateriale,[14] Marazzi's *Il posto dei calzini*[15] and Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude*[16] (not to mention Negri and Hardt's *Empire*,[17] among many others) managed to establish a dominant and influential interpretation of post-Fordism. On the non-theoretical side of the immaterial barricades, since 2001, the transnational mobilization of the EuroMayDay[18] picked up some

of these notions and started to link precarious workers and cognitive workers under the holy protection of San Precario.[19]

> Cognitive workers are networkers, precarious workers are networked, the former are brainworkers, the latter chainworkers: the former first seduced and then abandoned by companies and financial markets, the latter dragged into and made flexible by the fluxes of global capital.[20]

It was clear from the beginning that this cohabitation was problematic for the standard pauperism of the radical left. In the late 2000s, all these theoretical efforts condensed in general around the notion of cognitive capitalism, advanced specifically by the Paris-based magazine *Multitudes* and the Italian magazine *Posse*. Meanwhile, as an ongoing initiative, the peculiar French case of the *intermittents* workers of entertainment and cultural industries (theatre, dance, television, cinema) has been analysed in detail over several years by Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato.[21]

Second, there is an Anglo-American genealogy. During the golden age of net culture, the debate around ICT and the new economy was often linked to concept of 'knowledge economy'. The Austrian-born American economist Peter Drucker introduced the terms 'knowledge workers' and 'knowledge economy' during the 1960s in his books *The Effective Executive* and *The Age of Discontinuity*.[22] Fritz Machlup had, in fact, already described the 'knowledge industry' in 1962.[23] He distinguished between five sectors of the knowledge sector: education, research and development, mass media, information technologies, and information services. Based on this categorization, he calculated that 29 per cent of the GNP of the USA in 1959 had been produced in knowledge industries (40 years before Florida's statistics and with similar figures).[24] After the 'knowledge society' was popularized, the term 'information society' became increasingly prominent. Futurist Alvin Toffler introduced the notion of the *third wave* in 1980 as a deep anthropological turn of human society towards the hegemony of information and knowledge.[25] Manuel Castells similarly attempted to categorize 'informational capitalism' prior to his concept of 'network society'.[26] It is no mystery that the Anglo-American context has nothing of the *productivist* and *workerist* ap-

proach of continental Marxism. Here, the motto 'information wants to be free' could be cited as the perfect incarnation of this tradition, being focussed more on the issues of *freedom, rights* and *property* rather than *production* of knowledge. Finally, in 2001 the debate around copyleft escaped the boundaries of Free Software and established the widely celebrated paradigm of Creative Commons licences.

In 2002, the bestseller *The Rise of the Creative Class* by Richard Florida (itself based on controversial statistical evidence) appeared right in the middle of the Anglo-American debate but strangely absorbed many continental traits and concerns. His model at first seems inspired by the notion of *cultural capital* introduced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s and '80s.[27] In this sense, Florida breaks with the Anglo-American tradition, since his model is no longer exclusively based on intellectual property but on the exploitation of cultural capital. Indeed, this agenda is more appreciated in Europe by the Nordic social democracies for their cultural policies, rather than the neoliberal tendency of the UK, for instance.[28] So far the debate is dominated by two models: the institutional notion of Creative Industries based on the exploitation of Intellectual Property (typically British) and the new entrepreneurial model of Creative Economy based on the tactical and dynamic exploitation of the cultural capital of a given city (extensively adopted worldwide but especially in Northern Europe). These are the main coordinates (aside from the one-dimensional models of Creative Commons and 'peer production') through which a critical understanding of culture industry and a new politics of cognitive labour have to find their own path.

After years of fetishizing precarious labour and abstract gift economy, a paradigm shift is slowing taking place: attention has shifted to autonomous labour and autonomous production within the metropolitan factory of culture or global cognitive capitalism. However, this glorification of the autonomous power of knowledge-based producers is highly ambivalent. Even among activists there is a lot of confusion when they embrace the rhetoric of the 'creative class'. In the midst of such ambivalence, a new consciousness tries to emerge around the creation of meaning, understood as the creation of value and – consequently – the creation of conflict. At stake is the political re-engagement of a generation of creative workers (before getting mixed up with chain workers) and, at the same time, the 'economic' engagement of a generation of activists

(as the Seattle movement was more concerned with global issues than their own income). *My creativity = my value = my conflict.*

The Public Life of a Cognitive Object

There are many missing aspects to the debate on the 'creative economy', but also on the subject of cognitive labour. In this section, I want to begin by pointing out that the dimension of *value creation is always collective.* We require an investigation of the social processes behind institutional creativity and the creative power of collective desires. It must be emphasized that every cognitive product has a *political nature* (as an idea, brand, media, artefact, event) – the joy of creation belongs to the common. The focus on the issue of value creation, even from a basic economic point of view, is useful for dismantling dominant models that obscure the role of the social subject in producing it. An initial question is: what or who produces the value? Answer: the 'social factory' produces the greatest portion of the value (and of the conflict), not simply the new classes of web designers and academic researchers.

Secondly, we need to clarify that the political space of *cognitive production* is *competitive* (and not simply collective). Ontologically, as ideas constantly fight each other, but also politically, as cognitive workers are increasingly in competition with each other (and their political unification is utopian). Here, I do not focus on labour conditions or neoliberal policies within Creative Industries and Creative Economy, but on the *public life* of immaterial objects. By looking attentively at the nature of the cognitive products, something about their producers can be understood too. Cognitive products must be put in a space of forces, and framed from outside rather than described only through their intensive qualities. If production becomes creative and cognitive, or collective and social, what then are the new coordinates and forms of conflict? As a conclusion, I introduce the scenario of an *immaterial civil war* of cognitive workers, a political space of which Creative Industries and Creative Economy are only a small part. The notion of immaterial civil war demonstrates how social conflicts have been internalized, inoculated and 'securitized' into the individual. Immaterial civil war is the internal border (indeed biopolitical border) of a broader *immaterial class conflict.*

So far this looks like a linear scenario, but there is also a grey zone to take into consideration: the massification of the 'creative' attitude.

'Everyone is a creative' is a widespread slogan today. Many years after Benjamin's *artwork*, the mass artist enters the age of social reproducibility where 'creativity' is sold as a status symbol. Contemporary political issues for Benjamin would arise by 'the artists in the age of their social reproducibility'. The social base of cultural industry is getting larger (at least in the Western world) and unveils new scenarios. In the first period, cultural industries become hegemonic (as a fact and as a concept). In the second period, they face an entropy of meaning and producers. Thanks to the Internet and the digital revolution, conflicts of the latter stage are growing every day. Collective intelligence also has its own entropy.

Lazzarato Reading Tarde: The Social Dimension of Value

Contemporary criticism does not have a clear perspective of the public life of cognitive products: it is still largely dominated by the metaphors stolen from Creative Commons and Free Software, which support a flat economic vision of intellectual contagion without any notion of value and *valorization*. For this reason, Maurizio Lazzarato and his reading of Gabriel Tarde is useful for introducing a more dynamic scenario for explaining how value is produced by an accumulation of social desire and collective imitation. In particular, Lazzarato's re-proposed versions of the thought of the French sociologist Tarde in his book *Puissances de l'invention* [Powers of invention] and in his article 'La psychologie économique contre l'economie politique' are relevant here.[29]

To briefly summarize his argument in a few lines, Tarde's philosophy challenges the contemporary political economy firstly because it dissolves the opposition of material and immaterial labour and considers the 'cooperation between brains' as the main force in traditional precapitalist societies, not only post-Fordism. Secondly, it places innovation as the driving force of economy instead of monetary accumulation only. Smith, Marx and Schumpter did not really understand innovation as an internal force of capitalism: they were more concerned about *reproduction* rather than *production*, as Lazzarato observes. Thirdly, Tarde develops a new theory of value that is no longer based solely on use-value and exchange-value, but also on other kinds of value, like truth-value and beauty-value. Lazzarato: 'The *economic psychology* is a theory of the creation and constitution of values, whereas political economy and Marxism are theories to measure values.'[30]

However, Tarde's most crucial insight concerns the relation between science and public opinion; an intuition that Lazzarato contextualizes in the current scenario. The collective desire of the social subject immediately becomes a form of power: they are immediately *productive*, not only when busy in traditional forms of work:

> According to Tarde, an invention (of science or not) that is not imitated is not socially existent: to be imitated an invention needs to draw attention, to produce a force of 'mental attraction' on other brains, to mobilise their desires and beliefs through a process of social communication. . . . Tarde figures out an issue crossing all his work: the constituent power of the public.[31]

The value of a cognitive object is connected to its imitation and diffusion: in other words, its value is the product of a highly social cooperation between brains (or desires, if anatomical metaphors are not appreciated). In Tarde, the *public* is the 'social group of the future', integrating for the first time mass media as an apparatus of valorization in anticipation of post-Fordism. More specifically, Tarde considers the working class itself as a kind of 'public opinion' that is unified more on the base of common beliefs and affects rather than common interests.

The Tarde-Lazzarato connection introduces a dynamic and competitive model, where immaterial objects have to face the laws of the noosphere – *innovation* and *imitation* – in a kind of Darwinist environment. Tarde is also famous for introducing the S-shaped curve to describe the dissemination of innovation. This is the cartography of cognitive digital space; that dimension, for instance, that new idealists of the Net believe to be perfectly smooth, infinite and free. The curve of diffusion deforms cognitive space, and introduces frictions and asperities.
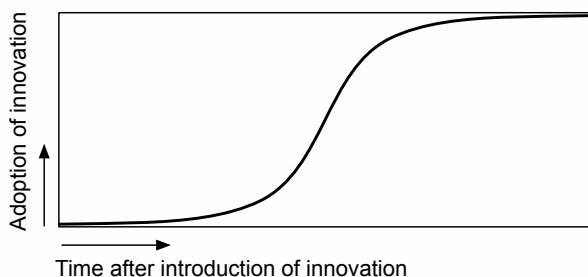
The S-shaped curve of innovation

However, the process of dissemination is never as linear and peaceful as this mathematical graph might suggest. On a collective scale, a cognitive product always *fights* against other products to achieve its niche and its eventual leadership. The destiny of an idea is always hegemonic, even in the 'cooperation between brains' and the digital domain of free multiplication. The natural environment of ideas is actually similar to the state of nature in Hobbes: the saying *Homo homini lupus* ('the man is a wolf to man') could be applied to media, brands, signs and any kind of semiotic machines of the knowledge economy. It is an immaterial but not silent 'war of all ideas against all ideas'. If Lazzarato and Tarde track back the social making of value to recognize the mundane status of the cooperation of brains beyond any traditional factory, a competitive nature of this common space and of the cognitive capitalism in general is clearer in the work of Enzo Rullani.

Enzo Rullani and the 'Law of Diffusion'

Enzo Rullani was among the first to introduce the term *cognitive capitalism*,[32] along with Antonella Corsani. Unlike most, he not only pinpoints the collective dimension of knowledge sharing, but also the process of valorization produced by and in different typologies of knowledge sharing. Rullani is quite clear about the fact that competition still exists (and perhaps is even stronger) in the realm of 'immaterial' economy. Rullani is one of few economists that has attempted to measure the concrete value produced by knowledge with mathematical formula, as in his book *Economia della conoscenza* [Economy of knowledge].[33] Rullani's basic lesson emphasizes that the value of knowledge is multiplied by its diffusion, and that circulation must be managed in a proper way to produce value. As Rullani puts it, in an interview with Antonella Corsani published in the journal *Multitudes* from 2000: 'An economy based on knowledge is structurally anchored to sharing: knowledge produces value *if it is adopted*, and the adoption (in that format and the consequent standards) makes *interdependency*.'[34]

The value of immaterial objects is produced by dissemination and interdependency: there is the same process behind the popularity of a pop star and behind the success of a software program. The digital revolution made the reproduction of immaterial objects easier, faster, ubiquitous and almost free. However, as Rullani points out, 'proprietary logic

does not disappear but has to *subordinate itself to the law of diffusion*'.[35] The strategies of proprietary logic are no longer based on the space and objects of production, but on the time and speed of diffusion.

> There are three ways that a producer of knowledge can distribute its uses, still keeping a part of the advantage under the form of: 1) a speed differential in the production of new knowledge or in the exploitation of its uses; 2) a control of the context stronger than others; 3) a network of alliances and cooperation capable of contracting and controlling modalities of usage of knowledge within the whole circuit of sharing.[36]

The value of an immaterial commodity (but this is also true of the old Fordist commodity) is derived by contextual and extensive qualities, not only by intensive and intrinsic factors. Controlling the *speed differential* of a knowledge invention means simply keeping its dominant position within the immaterial sphere, the wider material context and network of cooperation. Ideas can be multiplied easily but the original author can always exploit a dynamic advantage over everybody else that comes along afterwards. Knowledge has its material roots. A better understanding of the context, for instance, is something not easy to duplicate: it is about the genealogy of the idea, the cultural and social history of a milieu, the informal knowledge accumulated over years. The network of cooperation initiated by the author represents a precious *social capital*: it is all about contacts, trust, public relations and, somehow, street credibility. To draw from Virno's grammar of the general intellect, which quotes a novel by Luciano Bianciardi, a cognitive product (and its producer) must have 'skills and aptitudes of a political kind' to achieve success.[37]

Here, it is clear that a given idea produces value in a dynamic environment challenged by other forces and other competitors. Any idea lives in a jungle – in a constant state of guerrilla warfare – and cognitive workers often follow the destiny of their brainchildren. In the impalpable economy of digital networks and cognitive accumulation, time shrinks: it is no more the *measure* of value, but simply the *space* of competition. Time advantage is today a matter of seconds. Moreover, in the society of mass media where information equals white noise, the rarest

commodity is attention. An economy of scarcity still exists in cognitive capitalism as a shortage of attention, managed by the new discipline of the attention economy. When everything can be duplicated everywhere, time becomes more important than space. Interestingly, space becomes the measure of the value of an object, as measure of the immaterial territory and visibility that it has conquered and occupied. It is the precession of dimensions: in Fordism, space was the place of competition and time was the dimension of measure, whereas in post-Fordism, time has become the place of competition and space the dimension by which success is measured.

An example of competitive advantage in the digital domain is the *Wired* CD included with the November 2004 issue under the Creative Commons licences. Music tracks were donated for free copying, sharing and sampling by The Beastie Boys, David Byrne and Gilberto Gil, among others.[38] The neoliberal agenda of *Wired* magazine provides clear political coordinates for understanding this operation. Indeed, there are today many more examples of musicians and creative workers that associate their activity or work with copyleft, Creative Commons licences or filesharing on P2P networks, but we only hear about the frontrunners: those who came second or arrive late are no longer a novelty for the media hype. Anyway, there never is a total adherence to the Creative Commons crusade, it is always a hybrid strategy. Artists release part of their work as open and free in order to gain visibility and credibility, but not the whole corpus. Another strategy provides free distribution of work in the near future: not in the immediate present, but with a delay of a few months for instance (that gives a reasonable hint about the dimensions of the cognitive market). There's no scandal, we always suspected it was a race.

Rullani shows how competition is still present in the knowledge economy, and especially even in the parallel enclave of digital commons. Competition is a field that radical thought never attempted to enter because it was perceived as strategically controversial or politically incorrect to admit such rivalry. It appears difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct any unified political subject starting from such a balkanized scenario of 'social factories' and molecular biopolitical competition. So far the only political subject that clearly is projected on the background of cognitive capitalism is the common. The common is the only com-

prehensible and operative profile that can be associated with the notion of multitude. If the individual surplus-value is difficult to measure and reclaim within cognitive capitalism, collective accumulation and the exploitation of the common is something more visible and tangible.

David Harvey and the Collective Symbolic Capital

In this preliminary grammar of the immaterial commons, Tarde and Lazzarato are useful for illuminating the social dimension of valorization, whereas Rullani identifies this new habitat of knowledge as a space of tireless competition. The lifecycle of a cognitive object, therefore, has to confront several different stages: invention, dissemination, imitation, competition, hegemony and entropy. However, what is missing here and in many of the interpretations of the knowledge economy is the relation and the *friction* with the material substratum. David Harvey's essay 'The Art of Rent'[39] is one of the few texts that underlines the political asymmetries of the much-celebrated cultural commons. In this work, Harvey not only links intangible production and accumulation of real money through the regime of intellectual property, but also by tracking the *parasitic* exploitation of the immaterial domain by the material one.

The key example is Barcelona, where in the early 2000s the connection between real-estate economy and the driver of *cultural capital* was clear. The success of the city as an international brand is not merely a gift of nature, but relies upon its cultural and social heritage that today is fuelled by a new cosmopolitan and alternative culture. In fact, such collective production of a symbolic but still common resource is exploited first and foremost by real-estate speculators. The basic typologies of the gentrification processes are well known and will be articulated in the following chapter. For now, it is enough to only highlight two processes. Bottom-up gentrification: outsiders draw in artists that attract gentry. Or, top-down gentrification: open-minded and futuristic art institutions are built in a ghetto (like the MACBA in the Raval in Barcelona) and, raising house prices, force people to move.[40] Harvey, however, contextualizes these dynamics as part of a more general process.

Harvey reinterprets the notion of monopoly rent and applies it to culture. Traditionally, economic rent refers to land: 'All rent is based on the monopoly power of private owners of certain portions of the

globe.'[41] However, Harvey distinguishes between the monopoly of land and a monopoly of the mark of distinctions produced by that land. They imply two different kinds of rent: for example, the exploitation of the unique quality of a wine or of the vineyard producing that extraordinary wine.

> There are two situations in which the category of monopoly rent comes to the fore. The first arises because social actors control some special quality resource, commodity or location which, in relation to a certain kind of activity, enables them to extract monopoly rents from those desiring to use it. In the realm of production, Marx argues, the most obvious example is the vineyard producing wine of extraordinary quality that can be sold at a monopoly price. In this circumstance 'the monopoly price creates the rent'. . . . The commercial capitalist and the hotelier are willing to pay a premium for the land because of accessibility. These are the indirect cases of monopoly rent. It is not the land, resource or location of unique qualities which is traded but the commodity or service produced through their use. In the second case, the land or resource is directly traded upon (as when vineyards or prime real estate sites are sold to multinational capitalists and financiers for speculative purposes). Scarcity can be created by withholding the land or resource from current uses and speculating on future values. Monopoly rent of this sort can be extended to ownership of works of art (such as a Rodin or a Picasso) which can be (and increasingly are) bought and sold as investments. It is the uniqueness of the Picasso or the site which here forms the basis for the monopoly price.

Capitalism is always looking for marks of distinction. According to Harvey, culture today produces the sites of distinction that capitalism exploits in the form of monopoly rent or the commodification of material goods. In the European and global 'creative cities', real estate is the most significant business triggered by the symbolic or cognitive economy. Any immaterial space has its material parasites. Any shared music file ends up with its iPod, so to speak.

If the degree of dissemination affects the value of a cognitive product, as Rullani points out, Harvey places a limit on that valorization

process. Dissemination that goes too far can dissolve the marks of distinction into a mass product. There is an entropic ending in any idea after its hegemonic period. Harvey highlights the first contradiction: the entropy of the marks of distinction.

> The contradiction here is that the more easily marketable such items become the less unique and special they appear. In some instances the marketing itself tends to destroy the unique qualities (particularly if these depend on qualities such as wilderness, remoteness, the purity of some aesthetic experience, and the like). More generally, to the degree that such items or events are easily marketable (and subject to replication by forgeries, fakes, imitations or simulacra) the less they provide a basis for monopoly rent. . . . therefore, some way has to be found to keep some commodities or places unique and particular enough (and I will later reflect on what this might mean) to maintain a monopolistic edge in an otherwise commodified and often fiercely competitive economy.[42]

A second contradiction connected to the first is the tendency towards monopoly: if the value inflates, the only way to preserve the rent is to set up monopolies and avoid competition. For example, the digital and network revolution has attacked traditional monopoly rents (those accustomed to quite stable 'territories') and forced them to reinvent their strategies. The first reaction was to reclaim a stronger regime of intellectual property. On another level, capital was forced to find new material and immaterial territories to exploit. Harvey notices that capitalism rediscovers local cultures to preserve monopolies: the collective and immaterial sphere of local culture is a crucial dimension to maintain marks of distinction in a post-Fordist market.

> Recent struggles within the wine trade provide a useful model for understanding a wide range of phenomena within the contemporary phase of globalization. They have particular relevance to understanding how local cultural developments and traditions get absorbed within the calculi of political economy through attempts to garner monopoly rents. It also poses the question of how much the current interest in local cultural innovation and the resurrection and inven-

tion of local traditions attaches to the desire to extract and appropriate such rents.[43]

The cultural layer of the city and its unique local characteristics are a key component in the marketing of any Barcelona-based product, particularly in the case of real estate. But the third and most important contradiction discovered by Harvey is that global capital actually feeds local resistance to promote marks of distinction:

> Since capitalists of all sorts (including the most exuberant of international financiers) are easily seduced by the lucrative prospects of monopoly powers, we immediately discern a third contradiction: that the most avid globalizers will support local developments that have the potential to yield monopoly rents even if the effect of such support is to produce a local political climate antagonistic to globalization![44]

Again the case study is particular to Barcelona, where *alt* culture is still part of the postcard, to use a tourist metaphor. At this point, Harvey introduces the concept of *collective symbolic capital* to explain how culture can be easily and fruitfully exploited by capitalism. In effect, he takes the notion of *cultural capital* from Pierre Bourdieu and expands it over the collective and social processes that constitute the whole metropolis. The layer of cultural production attached to a specific territory is a fertile habitat for monopoly rents.

> If claims to uniqueness, authenticity, particularity and speciality underlie the ability to capture monopoly rents, then on what better terrain is it possible to make such claims than in the field of historically constituted cultural artefacts and practices and special environmental characteristics (including, of course, the built, social and cultural environments)? . . . The most obvious example is contemporary tourism, but I think it would be a mistake to let the matter rest there. For what is at stake here is the power of collective symbolic capital, of special marks of distinction that attach to some place, which have a significant drawing power upon the flows of capital more generally.[45]

The collective symbolic capital of Barcelona is shaped clearly now. The brand of Barcelona is a 'consensual hallucination' produced by many but exploited by few. Here, the condition of the creative workers (and of the whole society) becomes a vicious circle: they produce symbolic value for the real-estate business that perpetually squeezes them (as they suffer the housing prices and often face eviction). Furthermore, Harvey's model helps to understand Richard Florida's spectacular strategy more acutely. The so-called 'creative class' is nothing but a simulacrum of the collective symbolic capital that is needed to raise the marks of distinction of a given city. The image of 'creativity' is the collective symbolic capital transformed into monopoly rent and applied to a distinctive part of society (the anthropomorphic brand of the 'creative class'), a specific territory ('creative city') or a territory within the city itself ('creative district'). The 'creative class' is a parasitic simulacrum of the social creativity that is detached from the precariat and attached to the upper class.

> The rise of Barcelona to prominence within the European system of cities has in part been based on its steady amassing of symbolic capital and its accumulating marks of distinction. In this the excavation of a distinctively Catalan history and tradition, the marketing of its strong artistic accomplishments and architectural heritage (Gaudi of course) and its distinctive marks of lifestyle and literary traditions, have loomed large, backed by a deluge of books, exhibitions, and cultural events that celebrate distinctiveness. . . . This contradiction is marked by questions and resistance. Whose collective memory is to be celebrated here (the anarchists like the Icarians who played such an important role in Barcelona's history, the republicans who fought so fiercely against Franco, the Catalan nationalists, immigrants from Andalusia, or a long-time Franco ally like Samaranch)?[46]

Harvey tries to sketch out a political response, questioning which part of society is exploiting symbolic capital and which kinds of collective memory and imaginary are at stake. Symbolic capital is not unitary but a multiple space of forces, and can be continuously negotiated by the multitude that produced it.

It is a matter of determining which segments of the population are to benefit most from the collective symbolic capital to which everyone has, in their own distinctive ways, contributed both now and in the past. Why let the monopoly rent attached to that symbolic capital be captured only by the multinationals or by a small powerful segment of the local bourgeoisie? . . . The struggle to accumulate marks of distinction and collective symbolic capital in a highly competitive world is on. But this entrains in its wake all of the localized questions about whose collective memory, whose aesthetics, and who benefits. . . . The question then arises as to how these cultural interventions can themselves become a potent weapon of class struggle.[47]

The crucial political question for the whole factory of culture becomes: how to develop a symbolic capital of resistance that cannot be exploited as another mark of distinction? As Harvey points put, this kind of vicious circle works even better in the case of local resistance. Global capitals need anti-global resistance to improve the monopoly rent. Especially in the case of creative workers, resistance is always well-educated and well-designed. And in the case of Barcelona, it produces a titillating but never dangerous environment for the global middle-class. At this point, inspired by the history of this city, it is time to introduce an *immaterial civil war* into the space of symbolic capital.

Immaterial Civil War and the Common

An immaterial civil war is the condition of the economy of ideas when it is extended to the whole society, the immediate consequence of the condition of 'the artists in the age of their social reproduction' and the entropic decay of the general intellect. The term 'civil war' should be preferred as conflicts within cognitive capitalism have no clear class consciousness or composition and share the same media space. Confused is the nature of the cognitive products, of their copyright status as well as of their production, and then of their producers. Moreover, if it is true that 'there is no more outside' (as Negri and Hardt state in *Empire*) and that 'there are no longer social classes, but just a single planetary petty bourgeoisie, in which all the old social classes are dissolved' (as Agamben puts it in *The Coming Community*), conflicts can only take the form of an internal struggle.[48] The multitude has always been turbu-

lent and fragmented. While Florida dreams of a 'creative class struggle' (where *fashion victims* are evidently the first casualties), a form a civil war is actually taking place right *within* that comfortable notion of 'class' (and in any accommodating and academic notion of multitude). Moreover, 'civil war' ties into the glorious resistance of Barcelona (a political background that interestingly fuels its current social capital) and is also a reminder of the internal fights of any avant-garde movement (when anarchists and communists began to shoot at each other).

'Immaterial' is also the constant struggle on the stage of the society of the spectacle: a cruel Ballardian jungle of brands, pop stars, gadgets, devices, data, protocols and simulacra. Immaterial exploitation is the everyday life of precarious workers, in particular of the younger generations, quite aware of the symbolic capital produced by their lives *put to work* (new trends and lifestyles generated by what is called biopolitical production, the production of *forms of life*). The notion of immaterial civil war is the explosion of the social relations enclosed in the modern commodity. In his book *Les révolutions du capitalisme*, Lazzarato states that 'capitalism is not a mode of production, but a production of modes and worlds' (engineered by corporations and then sold to the people) and that the 'planetary economic war' is an 'aesthetic war' between different worlds.[49]

Immaterial civil war also refers to the usual conflicts between cognitive workers, despite all the rhetoric of knowledge sharing and digital commons. It is captured by the joke, 'a friend of mine stole my idea for a book on Creative Commons'. It emerges through the very well-known rivalries within academia and the art world, the economy of references, the race of deadlines, the competition for festival selection, the multiplication of festivals themselves, the envious and suspicious attitudes among activists. Cooperation is structurally difficult among creative workers, where a prestige economy operates in the same way as in any star system (not to mention philosophers!), and where new ideas have to confront each other, often involving their creators in a fight. As Rullani points out, there is more competition in the realm of the knowledge economy, where reproducibility is free and what matters is speed. In this context, the celebrated digital commons are easily thrown into the heat of the fray. How to rethink a notion of the common abreast of cognitive civil war? What is the role and constitution of the commons in the new cognitive warfare scenario?

Immaterial civil war is the political condition within today's cultural industry, digital economy and global cognitive capitalism. However, this concept of immaterial conflict does not have an anarchist background and does not eliminate class tensions. Immaterial civil war is a condition for the sphere of culture production to acknowledge, despite attempts at a digital arcadia and before any easy celebration of the knowledge economy. Under the immaterial civil war, a highly material class conflict is still ongoing, but it is not recognized as such. Confronting the immaterial civil war means that any political organization of collective knowledge production can only be established after recognizing its dark sides, not a priori. The *composition* of the immaterial civil conflict into a class conflict along the forms of exploitation of cognitive capitalism is the political question at stake. The immaterial civil war has thrown a lot of dust around the figure of a new social subject, but only a strong and productive definition of the common can be the starting point for profiling such emergent subjectivities. That means reversing the politics based on the *representation* of a common subject, and restarting from the *production* of a common resource. In the mirror of the immaterial civil war, there is the project of the common.

The Sabotage of the Cognitive Parasite

The parallel exploitation of social creativity is a sort of new benevolent parasite. There are indeed modes of exploitation of cultural capital that are not based on intellectual property and produce even more value, but interestingly, they have not been 'discovered' by social conflicts. While Harvey outlines the strategies of symbolic capitalism (as in *capitalism of the symbolic*), he clearly suggests that counter-strategies need to be developed by the metropolitan multitudes: 'Cultural interventions can themselves become a potent weapon of class struggle.' Is Harvey referring or suggesting something like cultural jamming or media activism? Probably not. All these models of political action seem to have reached their limit. From the 'play power' of the 1960s to the recent hoaxes of the Yes Men against global corporations, the model of culture jamming seems to be trapped in an idle loop; 'the rebel sell', as Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter say in their reactive way.[50] Political activism targeting cultural institutions, creative industries and new economy has always remained within fictional enclosures, never ques-

tioning the material economic infrastructure. Recently, the real battle has been concentrated on more stable contracts for precarious workers and a guaranteed income for all citizen-producers of the 'social factory'. But the institutional demand for a guaranteed income introduces a contradiction in the relation between the state apparatus and the social movements. Accordingly, Rullani notes that a welfare system transfers both innovation and risk to the state apparatus reinforcing it. How to defend the welfare without passing through the apparatus of the state? What Harvey suggests seems to affect not only the level of collective symbolic capital, but also the level of the material parasite exploiting the cultural domain. The fact that all the immaterial, cultural, symbolic, network and gift economies have a material, parallel and dirty counterpart, where the real money is exchanged is a difficult point to grasp for radical thought. Look at the economic coupling between MP3 files and the iPod, file-sharing networks and high-speed Internet access, free music and live concerts, Barcelona lifestyle and real-estate speculation, the art world and gentrification, global brands and sweatshops.

A form of resistance suggested by Harvey in the case of Barcelona is an assault on the myth of the 'creative city' rather than wanna-be-radical reactions that can contribute to making it even more exclusive. If people want to reclaim that symbolic surplus-value vandalized by a few speculators, the collective symbolic capital must be re-negotiated. A modern definition of the social pact should include the role of society in the production of *public cultural capital* out of *common cultural capital*. This approach introduces the option of a grassroots campaign to *rebrand* the city to undermine the accumulation of symbolic capital and alter the flows of money, tourists and new residents attracted by specific marks of distinction (Barcelona as a tolerant, alternative, open-minded city, etcetera). Another field of action, Harvey seems to suggest, is the specific areas where the 'art of rent' is working, like in the Raval or Poble Nou in Barcelona; areas where symbolic accumulation could be reset by a less symbolic sabotage. In the case of Barcelona, the main parasite to spotlight is real-estate speculation, but this insight can be applied to a broader scale and unveil similar *dispositifs*.

Recent forms of resistance have almost always been *representative* and media-oriented, envisioning the rise of a new *cognitariat* or of a

repoliticization of the collective imagery and its producers, like the mythologized 1960s. Many activists and artists are aware of the risk of overcoding of their messages and practices. Many protest actions merely succeed in fixing the attention economy even tighter around their targets. Traditional boycotts of big brands sometimes turn into free advertisements in their favour. What contemporary activism and critical thought have never attempted to explore is the material and economic dimension connected to the symbolic. Creative workers should recognize the surplus-value of the imagery they produce beyond their immaterial objects and all the remote political effects of any sign. Leaving the symbolic, entering the economy of the symbolic – a new generation of cognitive workers able to mobilize out of the imaginary is still to come.

Creative Sabotage in the Factory of Culture: Art, Gentrification and the Metropolis

> Self-valorisation is sabotage. . . . Sabotage is the *negative power of the positive*, its inverse, which is now at stake. . . . Our sabotage organizes the proletarian storming of heaven. And in the end that accursed heaven will no longer exist!
> Antonio Negri, *Domination and Sabotage*[1]

The 'Life of the City' versus the Chimera of the 'Creative City'

'The capital is spectacle to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes a skyline of cement' – at the twilight of the society of the spectacle, a densely material economy is unexpectedly discovered at the core of immaterial production. Debord's controversial aphorism can be finally reversed.[2] Surrounded by the relicts of the post-Fordist factory, where speculation is no longer profitable over the interminable fields of the Internet, the cultural economy reveals its love for concrete. After decades of parallel evolution, two strata of recent history finally converge in a unique *dispositif*: the urban revolution (as Lefebvre described the city in the 1960s, a motor of autonomous production and capital accumulation)[3] and the cultural industry (as the Frankfurt school inaugurated the transformation of culture in business and deception, followed by the apocalyptic simulacra of postmodernism).[4] The name of the newborn chimera is 'creative cities' – indeed, a chimera, as the mask of culture is used to cover the hydra of concrete and real-estate speculation.

Obviously, the literature promoting the 'creative cities' (such as the work of Richard Florida) or denouncing their hidden neoliberal agenda and social costs is extensive. In this section, however, the ideological construct of the 'creative city' is approached from an alternative perspective in order to provide a *reverse engineering* of its underlying economic model, so that its functioning can be politically grasped and effectively inverted. Firstly, the unsexy struggles against gentrification are examined in detail as a set of specific case studies; indicators of the real engine of the 'creative economy', instead of the usual indexes and

econometrics of 'talent'. Secondly, the significance of the profound asymmetry between the layer of symbolic and immaterial production and the layer of urban and material production is explained. The 'creativity' of the city is simply a biomorphic extension of its social composition and competition. The two layers move at different speeds and directions – in this activity, there is nothing like the social progress commonly associated with institutional modes of 'creativity'. Finally, this section concludes by avoiding both the art of complaining and the art of celebrating the 'creative economy' in order to sketch a grammar of *creative sabotage* that is able to articulate the contemporary relations between urban multitudes and the dynamic matrix of gentrification.

The chimera of 'creative cities' is a complex machine, no longer based on the opposition between high and low culture that was central to the classical canon and the Frankfurt School. Specifically, it is a biopolitical machine, where all aspects of life are integrated and put to work, where new lifestyles become commodities, where culture is considered a material flow like any other and where, in particular, the collective production of imagery is hijacked to increase private profits – here, the creative city appears as a closed circuit.[5] In this respect, 'biopolitics' can be dismantled in a heterodox etymology as *bios* and *politike (techne)*; that is, the 'art of ruling (the life of) the city'. The biopolitical machine, therefore, means the 'life of the city' as a productive core. Despite urban décor and futuristic architecture, social networks and digital frontiers, the productive core of any ecosystem is always grounded in the soil. Just as Italian Operaismo placed the workers at the centre of capitalist innovation and moved the 'social factory' to the centre of post-Fordism, the productive force of the metropolis, and especially those energies that make urban space so valuable, must be located; even if this path may reveal the cynical terminus of an easy political dream.

Introducing the New Urban Frontier

Put simply, 'gentrification is class war'. That was the slogan of the legendary anti-gentrification battle over Tompkins Square Park in New York, as photographed by Neil Smith in the case study *par excellence* of gentrification: the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Smith was the first to introduce gentrification as the new fault line between classes in contemporary global cities, signalled in the title of his seminal book: *The*

New Urban Frontier.[6] The new class division of capital accumulation is internal to the metropolis, Balkanizing the whole urban territory. It is a space of *endocolonization*: the inner colonization of the city rediscovered as urban wild nature.

> During the latter part of the twentieth century the imagery of wilderness and frontier has been applied less to the plains, mountains and forests of the West – now handsomely civilized – and more to US cities back East. As part of the experience of postwar suburbanization, the US city came to be seen as an 'urban wilderness'; it was, and for many still is, the habitat of disease and disorder, crime and corruption, drugs and danger.[7]

Emergent relations between classes and new strategies of capital are played along this unofficial internal border of the city. If the metropolis becomes the new diffuse factory, gentrification is a principle apparatus of capital accumulation and governance. Just as Baudelaire witnessed the *Hausmannization* of Paris, gentrification can be interpreted as the equivalent post-Fordist procedure to rule the metropolis.[8] Today, this *dispositif* is constantly evolving and becoming more complex. Of course, housing struggles against gentrification are nothing new across European (and global) cities, except for the fact that now gentrification forms a promiscuous relation with cultural production. When Ruth Glass originally introduced the term 'gentrification', she described the districts of London in the 1950s with these words:

> One by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages – two rooms up and two down – have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences . . . . Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.[9]

This initial stage is what Smith described as the first wave of gentrification in *The Urban Frontier.* A second wave followed in the 1970s and '80s,

with the third wave of the 1990s considered a broad form of 'generalized gentrification'. For Smith, these urban trends are explained according to two general theories: consumption-orientated perspectives (based simply on the collective cultural preferences and behaviour of the residents) and a more production-based approach. In the later case, from an economic perspective a *rent gap* develops which eventually triggers the entire process:

> The rent gap is the disparity between the potential ground rent level and the actual ground rent capitalized under the present land use. . . . Once the rent gap is wide enough, gentrification may be initiated in a given neighborhood by any of the several different actors in the land and housing market.[10]

These models, however, do not adequately explain the contemporary terrain of gentrification strategies and techniques. Smith was writing a decade before the New Economy and could not anticipate such a massive experiment of putting the collective imaginary to work. Nevertheless, Smith himself recognized that 'the integration of cultural and capital-centered explanation is vital', precisely as scholars such as Sharon Zukin had already described in *Loft Living*.[11] Today, a new phase can be seen: a *second-order gentrification*, a global popularization of the grammar of gentrification and its strategic connection with 'collective symbolic capital' (as David Harvey describes the engine behind urban speculation in his essay on Barcelona, 'The Art of Rent'). In a similar way, the role of artists, bohemians and hipsters in the gentrification of New York's East Village in the 1960s was highlighted by Christopher Mele in his book *Selling the Lower East Side*.[12] Not to mention Manuel Castells' work on the particular role of gay men as 'gentrifiers' in San Francisco during the early 1980s.[13] These studies are just a few examples that introduce a better understanding of the theoretical context hijacked by Richard Florida two decades later and transformed into banal marketing strategies for provincial centres, re-labelled as 'creative cities'.

Compared to traditional forms of gentrification, we are now witnessing the rise of gentrification driven by the *in vitro* production of artificial cultural capital and 'creative cities' market campaigns. Smith sees the Lower East Side of Manhattan as the start of this process:

This strategy was probably pioneered in New York's Lower East Side where in the early 1980s landlords who were unable to rent commercial properties offered them at cheap rents to artists, giving them 5-year leases. After 5 years, with no rent control on commercial properties and with the neighbourhood now gentrifying rapidly, landlords began to demand 400%, 600% even 1,000% rent increases to renew leases. The artists had done their work as the shock troops of gentrification and were themselves displaced.[14]

In the early 1980s, second-order gentrification was defined by Sharon Zukin as an 'artistic mode of production', but today this 'mode of production' has become an extended *immaterial factory*. Over the whole of Europe – across both Berlin and Barcelona, for instance – we are witnessing the condensation of a peculiar homogenous form of cultural capital as the leading force behind real estate and the 'creative cities' strategy of city councils eager to attract both investments and highly skilled workers. The side effects of such locally directed capital accumulation has surfaced clearly in crisis after crisis, especially when investment funds (like in any period of recession) flowed from the dotcom crash back into real estate speculation, avid for new dreams of cultivation. The real estate business, as a result, has established a perverse machinery in alliance with the art world and cultural production in almost every major European city.

More interestingly, for the first time, the current generation of radical movements and urban subcultures have to face the concrete by-products of their symbolic labour (even if it has been clear for decades that the counterculture has been feeding the society of spectacle and cultural industries with fresh ideas).[15] At the turn of the twenty-first century, gentrification is a new priority for grassroots activism after the rise of the 'precariat', especially in major dynamic centres like London, Berlin and Barcelona. Considering that even Walter Benjamin complained about bohemian bars being invaded by the new rampant middle class (in the 1930s!), a century-long conflict could be traced with Berlin alone as a continental case study (indeed, a history distinct from the usual neoliberal context of New York and London).[16] In the German capital, the most crucial event has been the arrest of Andrej Holm in July 2007 for his research on gentrification in East Berlin – an arrest that made clear

to a wider audience the scale of economic interests and police attention around the new G word.[17] What is currently missing within political discourse, academic research and the art world is a new composition of forces between artists and activists, and a necessary upgrade of the theory toolbox for an accelerated capitalism that is constantly changing its fronts of speculation. What is missing is an extensive cartography of the productive heart of the global cities and a new political grammar of the metropolitan conflicts around cultural production.

The Hydra of Concrete behind the European 'Creative Cities'

The link between local culture and gentrification, and on a broader scale between city brands and real estate speculation, has become increasingly clear across Europe in various separate contexts. Each major city has developed its own unique model and large-scale projects.

A typical example is the choice in Barcelona for the location of the futuristic museum of contemporary art MACBA right in the centre of the old conflictive *barrio* of the Raval, where it landed in 1995 as a minimalist white spaceship in a ghetto that was still following the paths of the medieval street map.[18] The gentrifying effect of MACBA was successful largely thanks to the underground culture surrounding (and supporting) the new museum, and especially due to the traditionally democratic social fabric of Barcelona that was already starting to attract the youth of the global middle-class to Catalonia. The gentrification of the Raval, however, also had its obscure, controversial and violent aspects, as Joaquim Jordà demonstrated in his film *De nens*, where a case of pederasty was used as an excuse to promote the social regeneration of the district and cover some of the less ethical real-estate interests.[19] Moreover, this process of citywide gentrification in Barcelona resulted in house prices skyrocketing over just a few years, and was taken by David Harvey as a central case study in 'The Art of Rent'.[20] Here, the real-estate business is explained precisely in relation to the 'collective symbolic capital' sedimented in the history of Barcelona. In the same period, meanwhile, a comparable operation was inaugurated in Bilbao: the Guggenheim museum (in 1997) designed by Frank Gehry soon became the main tourist attraction of the city (indeed, so as to eventually become known as the 'Guggenheim effect'). However, these two examples of museum-driven regeneration are still following the tourist wave

planned after the 1992 summer Olympics of Barcelona. A more interest-
ing and relevant case study is the recent '22@' urban plan designed to
regenerate the former industrial district of Poble Nou under the concept
of the 'innovation district' and 'knowledge city'.[21] Both in the districts
of Raval and Poble Nou, many forms of resistance mushroomed against
the voracious real-estate speculation. In particular, the project Nau
21 in the former industrial complex of Can Ricart tried to establish a
counteragenda against the institutional propaganda of the 'creative
economy' used to attract investments into the area.[22] As these projects
were under way, the dramatic housing situation in Spain triggered the
biggest movement in Europe around housing rights. Appropriating the
title of a famous film, the movement 'V de Vivienda' organized several
demonstrations attended by more than 10,000 people for each event in
Barcelona, as well as other major Spanish cities, under the politically
incorrect slogan: 'No vas a tener casa en tu puta vida' [You will never
own a house in your fucking life].[23]

In the early 2000s, Barcelona reached a critical mass of high-income
inhabitants, mainly because of the 'immigration' of young people and
bobos (*bourgeois-bohemians*) from Northern Europe and North-America.[24]
After this Barcelona boom and its market saturation, the centre of real-
estate speculation shifted to Berlin, in search of fresh opportunities and
new spaces. Here, as in Barcelona, the cultural history and underground
of East Berlin was a massive driver for gentrification. Since the fall of
the Wall, a cycle of internal migrations has reshaped the social geogra-
phy of the city, passing as a slow tide through the districts of Kreuzberg,
Mitte, Prenzlauerberg, Friedrichshain, Wedding and Neukölln. Because
of the abundance of vacant buildings and empty areas, it seems that
this process will continue for some time, even if rumours of experimen-
tal attempts of gentrification have been reported in some apparently
ungentrifiable outskirts, such as Gropiusstadt.[25] Despite their different
urban settings, Berlin and Barcelona share a similar destiny. The old
underground of Berlin attracted and then boosted gentrification, just
as in Barcelona. Later, over this cultural milieu, a second-order strategy
developed. Interestingly, in Berlin, a project similar to the 22@ plan of
Barcelona is in progress. The project 'Media Spree' aims to transform
a big area of East Berlin on the Spree River into a new pole for media
industries.[26] The same architects who designed the new government

district are involved, with a similar volumetric involvement of concrete. The area is well known for its underground music scene, and there is a stark contradiction that reveals more than a hundred analyses: to promote this area, the magazines of the investment companies are using the imagery of the same clubs that they put under eviction.[27] Even here, activists have set up a political campaign to block the gentrification plans, like 'Media Spree versenken' [Media Spree sinking],[28] and organized grassroots international workshops such as 'Right to the City'.[29] The arrest of Andrej Holm in July 2007 for his research on gentrification occurred in this larger context of citywide urban planning.

On a smaller scale, each city in Europe is implementing similar strategies of city regeneration. Development in Amsterdam (but also Rotterdam), for instance, presents a unique blend of 'cultural breeding', social housing, creative cities marketing and demolitions.[30] This peculiar model deserves special attention, as the Dutch strategy of 'cultural breeding grounds' [*culturele broedplaatsen*] is publicly used to *artificially* promote areas to be gentrified, but was initiated many years before the 'creative economy' hype. As the former mayor of Amsterdam Schelto Patijn famously stated: 'There is no culture without subculture' – even if the Netherlands today appears as a country without bohemia in the classic definition (the ironic destiny of the Low Countries: an evaporated underground). A good example of Dutch cooptation policies is the former building of the *Volkskrant* newspaper managed by the Urban Resort foundation in a multicultural creative factory.[31] In this project, according to the traditional Dutch 'radical pragmatism', there is an explicit awareness of the gentrification effect triggered in the neighbourhood by the post-squat generation. Another interesting dimension is the concept of 'co-construction' experimented with in the Zuidas area, the new business district south of the city. Here, art projects are directly involved with the construction of the new site and are not simply a late addition, demonstrating how valorization and glamorization are already in the mind of the urban developers before completion.[32]

The biggest scale of similar gentrification operations across Europe is Hackney in East London, a section of the city under 'regeneration' for the upcoming 2012 Olympic Games.[33] This critical area is monitored by a hundred grassroots activist initiatives (widely covered, for instance, by the collective 'The London Particular' and *Mute* magazine among oth-

ers).[34] The scale of the investments in London is most likely incomparable to any other area in Europe (without mentioning the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the new Chinese urban economy that falls well beyond this brief overview).

From the early 1980s in New York to the recent Media Spree project in Berlin, real-estate speculators and urban 'regenerators' have learnt the grammar of gentrification and the 'artistic mode of production'. However, there may be other genealogies behind this new business. A globalized gentrification process is also a consequence of the global capital that after the dot-com crash flowed into real estate, reinventing it as an upgraded version of the New Economy, where exactly like the Internet saga, the collective imagery has a central role in the process of valorization. Real-estate speculation also follows the 2008 subprime crisis that triggered a global financial meltdown, involving local foreclosures and evictions. As Saskia Sassen has aptly shown in her pivotal works on global cities, the reality of the local is always determined by the flows of financial capital.[35] And back on the side of state power, as Neil Smith reminds us, the 'urban frontier' is always militarized through a 'revanchist city', where zero-tolerance policies help to cleanse and prepare urban terrains for profit.[36]

Concerning the political scenario of gentrification, two analytic options must be scrutinized: indulging in the necrophilia of global capital and the police state (as a dominant criticism and even a certain fatalistic Marxism), or turning attention to the real social subject that originates value. The traditional political analysis of gentrification stops at the usual point of a moral complaint against unethical business practices. But actually, a proper political platform can be established only if the economic engine of gentrification is understood, dismantled and reversed. Indeed, if the forces of gentrification are considered a social and economic actor, a counter-subject is clearly lacking on the opposing side of the political map. The energy spent in a hyper-analytical criticism of Richard Florida's ideology might, therefore, be otherwise deployed on a proper constituent ground. While urban communities and activists are sometimes stuck in old languages and tactics, anti-gentrification struggles have opened up a new space of action and knowledge waiting to be described and connected across Europe.

The Metropolis as Social Factory and Motor of the Surplus

A bird's-eye view over Europe reveals the nature of the anti-gentrification struggles, but only from above: an invisible vortex of capital re-colonizing and renovating old parts of a city, making profit out of their inhabitants and then evicting them. Yet who produces the value that capital comes to appropriate? It is usually the history, the social imagery and fabric of a specific community that makes an area desirable for new inhabitants and business. Even when second-order gentrification and city branding strategies produce artificial imagery themselves, they rely on pre-existing cultural capital. Only by looking from below at the roots of capital can the diffuse and metropolitan social subject responsible for the economic value of a city be recognized. How does the metropolis breathe when not doing business? Even here, a brief genealogy of the political concepts of the early twenty-first century might be useful.

The new forms of urban resistance and production cannot adequately be understood through the usual concepts of political subjectivity. Here, the notion of 'creative class' as an emergent social subject is absolutely useless because it articulates a friction-less and conflict-less notion of agency, described only on the basis of a 'positive' or 'progressive' paradigm. Other political figures recently introduced by social movements, such as precarious and cognitive workers (see the EuroMay-Day events across Europe), are effectively framed against new labour conditions and forms of production in post-Fordist societies, but are incomplete when applied to the cultural economy of a metropolis, as they tend to exclusively underline individual labour.[37] In this sense, the concept of multitude has been developed by the Italian post-Operaismo precisely in order to escape the prison house of the working class and to demonstrate how the factory itself evaded its own gates by inundating the whole territory and the whole metropolis. Multitude has not been introduced to glorify the multiple identities of the global society (in an unconscious version of multiculturalism), but to underscore the productive force of a distributed social subject that has the metropolitan collective as its very incarnation. In a series of seminars, 'Multitude et Métropole' organized in Paris in 2005 and 2006 by Negri, Vercellone and others,[38] one of the hypotheses that emerged stated that 'the multitude is to the metropolis, as the working class is to the factory'.[39] Indeed, the idea of the city as the engine of contemporary capitalism was already

advanced by Henri Lefebvre in the late 1960s throughout his book *The Urban Revolution*.[40] In the belly of the metropolis, therefore, is the multitude – but what does this metropolitan multitude produce? Far from purely theoretical concerns, direct evidence of its value as a force of production can be found in the concretion of real-estate capital. If the economic rent accumulated on real estate is taken as a starting point, then we can begin to identify a larger and plural political profile that complete the traditional figure of the working class or the new 'precariat'. The general value of rent is indeed produced by the whole social subjectivity, what is called the multitude.

Behind the notion of the metropolitan multitude, there is the collapse of the Marxian trinity of rent, profit and wages. Thanks to the work of Carlo Vercellone on rent (introduced in the previous chapter), the economy of the metropolis can be explained in a much clearer way. Thus, Vercellone's saying, 'rent is the new profit', refers to the first vector of exploitation and accumulation in the metropolis, since profit is extracted less by wage labour than through the rent applied on material spaces, like housing or mortgages. While Vercellone acknowledges that this parasitic and unproductive dimension has always been part of capitalism, he suggests that it is becoming increasingly hegemonic today. In the age of anonymous speculative crises and the financialization of the daily life, the profile of a new subject is waiting to be charted or expressed. Gentrification is simply the surface tension of a massive submerged parasite. However, for this precise reason, a comparative analysis of old and new case studies is required to contrast Anglo-American theoretical models with Continental approaches, and if possible, to integrate them. The nexus point for understanding the metropolitan 'factory of culture' is the asymmetry between cultural economy and the material economy. We need a pragmatic and materialistic taxonomy of the new apparatuses of accumulation established by post-Fordist capitalism along this asymmetry – a sort of new Foucauldian taxonomy of the *dispositifs* of the factory of culture.

Intermezzo: Radical Cities: Negative Index versus Positive Index

It is not enough to criticize Richard Florida's ideological model by saying its econometric basis is false. The point is not to demonstrate conceptually how the 'creative economy' is unrelated to economic

growth, but on the contrary, how it is tied to economic rent and speculation with no necessary reallocation of wealth. Virtually, there are many ways to measure the 'social creativity' of a given city, and it is an important exercise to reveal how numbers and apparently rigorous statistics are used to conceal partisan perspectives.

Florida states, for example, a univocal *positive* relationship between the bohemian index and the hi-tech industry index: the resulting construct can be labelled as the *(Ever) Positive Index.* In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, he compares four indexes with those of economic growth and hi-tech innovation: 1) Bohemian Index: share of creative people in a given area, for instance authors, designers, musicians; 2) Talent Index: population share with a four-year degree or above; 3) Melting Pot Index: foreign-born population share; 4) Gay Index: number of households with co-habiting same-sex partners (this combined definition, I might add, is immediately suspect for describing a typical university students flat!). In subsequent works, moreover, Florida continues to assume a *positive* relationship between all data gathered on a cultural district, especially those between bohemia and economical development, indulging in a pure 'quantitative rhetoric'. Logically, we are confronted with a truism: it is obvious that economic growth is directly related to levels of education and to a tolerant and open cultural environment. Florida's research approaches society as a flat surface of data with no acknowledgment of social evolution and causality. For example, it could happen that the Gay Index grows together with the Hi-Tech Index because in a wealthier society gays and lesbians feel freer to express and reclaim their social status (and that means individuals 'coming out' being more visible in the US census). Maybe, in a more intelligible way, the Bohemian Index could even be directly related to economic growth because wealthy people can finance younger generations and their 'artistic talent'.

It is not always true that a comfortable environment stimulates creativity. A *Negative Index* could equally be imagined as a measure of the relationship between an unfriendly environment and creative production. For instance, Florida's work presents no insight into the role of counterculture and the underground: there is quite a large world left off the radar of his Bohemian Index, concerned as it is with art professionals visible to the census statistics. Another reverse index that might be conceptualized is the relationship between low rents and the density of

'creative' people. In a less conformist reading of 'creativity', interesting people tend to live where rents are low and there is an interesting fringe of cultural life (as in many European cities from Barcelona to Berlin and specific districts like Hackney in London or Belleville in Paris). This process of migration is, of course, connected to gentrification: 'radical' people bring creatives that draw in *bobos*. At the same time, statistics about squats, social centres and occupied buildings, as well as illegal parties, could be interesting indicators, together with, for instance, the average consumption of psychoactive drugs like 'magic mushrooms', LSD, MDMA, and so forth. Even the level of social conflict could indicate a vibrant and healthy scene (strikes, mobilizations, political publications). In an extremely limited manner, Florida only considers freelancers and professionals as autonomous people from an economic perspective. The concept of the Radical City could alternatively replace that of the 'creative city'. Just as the notion of 'creativity' is built on the Talent Index, the *radical dimension* of a city could be based on a new form of workers' enquiry applied to cognitive and biopolitical production, a proposal that I will not follow here, but leave open as a future line of research for others to explore.

The Collective Symbolic Capital and the Asymmetries of the Common

Again, what exactly do the metropolitan multitudes produce? Understanding the value of cultural capital in the economy of the city means unpacking the structure of contemporary material and immaterial commodities. Let's start from the work required to create those commodities, that is, with two popular post-Fordist figures: the precarious workers (*precariat*) and the brain workers (*cognitariat*). Both have passed through different attempts to be harmonized and integrated within a less conservative paradigm, a framework able to skip the division between manual labour and intellectual labour. A common synthesis declares that all the service workers do cognitive labour, and that all the brain workers share precarious working conditions. However, looking at the structure of contemporary commodities, more than two levels can be distinguished. The total value of a commodity is produced by the material labour *plus* the cognitive labour *plus* the symbolic value brought by the public. The first is easily described according to the classic coordinates of wage labour and profit. The second

is the value of knowledge embodied in design and intellectual property (patents, copyrights, trademarks). The third refers to the value of the brand produced by the attention economy of publics, mass media and advertisement. This later category has been analysed from a different perspective by Anglo-American literature on the brand economy, and in a more extensive way by Maurizio Lazzarato's research on Gabriel Tarde's notion of public, by Carlo Vercellone's approach to economic rent and by Enzo Rullani's concept of the knowledge economy. Within this framework, the symbolic component of value is the most important category produced by the social factory. More specifically, the modern commodity is simply double, since two main dimensions can be recognized: the dimension of profit (value produced by individual work) and the dimension of rent (value produced by collective desire). In this sense, the *social value* of an artistic or cultural object is the value produced by collective desire. This social value is exploited by dynamic and temporary monopolies applied to the common and intangible sphere of such desires.

To apply another scheme, the rent economy and temporary monopolies parasiting these islands of desire involve two kinds of entities: objects and spaces. Singular objects are, for instance, immaterial brands. In contrast, urban areas, virtual networks and communication infrastructures are natural or artificial spaces dominated by new forms of rent speculation. There are, moreover, peculiar monopolies of spaces, even in the cultural economy. To give a practical example, the definitions of Creative Industries and 'creative economy' are directly related to these two different dominions. The original definition of Creative Industries is attached to the exploitation of intellectual property applied to new knowledge products, whereas the 'creative economy' of Richard Florida and his 'creative cities' involve the diffuse space of the city as a field of valorization and business. In other words, it is based on the exploitation of diffuse cultural capital rather than patents or copyrights. Consequently, the cultural economy of objects (rent on intellectual property) operates on a level parallel to the cultural economy of spaces (rent on symbolic spaces). As Rullani likes to remind us, these two domains follow a contrary logic. The first is based on the secrecy of knowledge and the protection of intellectual property, the second on the free multiplication and sharing of cultural products and imagery.

These two domains (and business models) are interwoven and involved in a process of furious capital accumulation, yet critical thought is not able to distinguish them.

These schematic descriptions (the hybrid nature of commodities, rent over spaces, rent over objects) are useful for explaining the relation between the 'social factory' that produces cultural capital, on the one hand, and the urban economy exploiting and putting it to work, on the other. Introducing the multiple nature of the commodity is important for understanding how the exploitation of the social imagery works, how the desire, dreams and lifestyles of the multitudes are put *to work* and transformed into value. The new interpretative framework of rent developed by Vercellone clarifies the complex scenario of cognitive capitalism that indeed has many fall-outs on the physical metropolis. Traditionally, rent is the term that refers to land monopolies, but it has now become a crucial notion for understanding the economy of culture and metropolis. Today, rent can be applied to a diverse set of new material and immaterial spaces, and for these reasons, a new taxonomy of economic rent is required. In relation to modern forms of space, we can distinguish between: 1) rent on material spaces and new infrastructures, including communication infrastructures; 2) rent on immaterial and virtual spaces, such as online communities and social networks; 3) rent on material spaces valorized through immaterial processes.

In his essay 'The Art of Rent', David Harvey traces the third rental form as an expansion of his previous analyses of accumulation.[41] Capitalism is always searching for new *marks of distinction* to apply to goods and with which to cultivate new monopolies. Through the concept of the *collective symbolic capital* of a given urban locale, Harvey identifies key distinctions that make a certain place valuable. Here, Harvey is explicitly referring to Barcelona and its recent gentrification triggered by a high quality of life and a rich urban milieu of historicity and sociality. This model produces a crucial rupture by introducing a profound asymmetry between the immaterial level of collective culture (call it what you like: general intellect, collective imagery, cultural production, etcetera) and the material base of the urban economy. Harvey, therefore, introduces an ambivalent scenario, where the progressive collective imagery produced by the urban multitudes can be hijacked by capital and exploited against itself. Surprisingly the hype around a democratic and

tolerant city is turned into business without any intervention of brutal enclosure. The notion of collective symbolic capital is an example of an uneven economy based on the multiplication of knowledge (to quote Rullani) or the exploitation of the common (as Negri and post-Opera-ismo would have it).

On the other hand, a notable contemporary trend is based on pro-moting the knowledge economy through easy and progressive sym-metries. New keywords like 'knowledge society', 'creative economy' and 'peer-to-peer production' advance an optimistic scenario through a belief in a benevolent 'wealth of networks' under the easy slogan 'infor-mation is non-rival'. However, on careful inspection, it is apparent that contemporary capitalism is composed by strata of alternating densities that slide over each other, inducing *asymmetrical* frictions; that is, pro-ducing and accumulating profit. A progressive imagery can always have a non-virtuous relation with the urban substratum that produced it – as the 'life of the polis' can be easily absorbed into the value chain. This ir-regularity between the imagery and the economy of the metropolis can be mapped in every case considered thus far (from Barcelona to Berlin, from London to Amsterdam).

The Artistic Mode of Production

What is the status of art production in a scenario of asymmetric economic forces? Contemporary art objects occupy a role between a commodity and a cultural artefact, and ultimately they are also part of the general accumulation produced by the social factory. This nature was already revealed by Dadaism, conceptualism and artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century, but today, those intuitions are a natural component of spectacular capitalism itself. What is underestimated and under-investigated is the social role of art in global cities – its mo-lar dimension, not simply its molecular aspects. When Sharon Zukin introduced the *artistic mode of production* to describe the gentrification techniques in New York, the aesthetic dimension of art was not specifi-cally at stake, but its 'society life'. The artistic mode of production rose when real estate speculators learnt the lesson and realized that col-lective symbolic capital can be catalysed and accumulated artificially. Sadly enough, from Amsterdam to Berlin, the art world is becoming the personal *fashion designer* of real estate. In New York particularly, the chi-

mera born out of the assemblage of real estate and cultural production raised its head, as Smith reminds us:

> On the Lower East Side two industries defined the new urban frontier that emerged in the 1980s. Indispensable, of course, is the real estate industry which christened the northern part of the Lower East Side the 'East Village' in order to capitalize on its geographical proximity to the respectability, security, culture and high rents of Greenwich Village. Then there is the culture industry – art dealers and patrons, gallery owners and artists, designers and critics, writers and performers – which has converted urban dilapidation into ultra chic. Together in the 1980s the culture and real estate industries invaded the rump of Manhattan from the west. . . . Block by block, building by building, the area was converted to a landscape of glamour and chic spiced with just a hint of danger.[42]

In particular, the article 'The Fine Art of Gentrification' by Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan outlines this promiscuous relation between the real-estate business and art business in detail.

> Although the new East Village art scene and its legitimators in the press ignore the workings of gentrification, they have, in fact, allowed themselves to become enmeshed in its mechanism. Galleries and artists drive up rents and displace the poor. Artists have placed their housing needs above those of residents who cannot choose where to live. The alignment of art-world interest with those of the city government and the real-estate industry became explicit to many residents on the Lower East Side during the ultimately successful battle which community groups waged to defeat Mayor Koch's Artist Homeownership Program (AHOP).[43]

The Artist Homeownership Program was a planned strategy of the New York city council 'to develop cooperative or condominium loft-type units for artists through the rehabilitation of properties owned by the city' and 'to provide artists with an opportunity for homeownership to meet their special work requirements, to encourage them to continue to live and work in New York City and to stimulate unique alternatives for

the reuse and rehabilitation of city-owned property' (something quite similar to the present 'cultural breeding grounds' policies of Dutch cities).[44] Despite the lobbying of the art community, the plan was opposed by a strong social protest and defeated.

> The city's eagerness to allocate three million dollars of these public funds for the housing needs of white, middle-class artists was seen as a clear indication of the city's attitudes toward the housing needs of the poor. 'It's like taking food out of the mouth of someone who is hungry and giving it to someone who is eating everyday,' commented one community worker.[45]

However, the gentrification apparatus is composed by a hybrid nature and forms a complex consensual machinery that moves beyond the control of the city council itself. Many subjects, for instance, cooperate to produce a 'new state of mind' and a new symbolic space.

> Consciously or unconsciously, they approach the neighborhood with dominating and possessive attitudes that transform it into an imaginary site. Art journals, the mass media, galleries, established alternative spaces, and museums manipulate and exploit the neighborhood, thereby serving as conduits for the dominant ideology that facilitates gentrification. Myriad verbal and visual representations of the neighborhood circulate in exhibition catalogues, brochures, and magazines. Through such representations a neighborhood whose residents are fighting for survival metamorphoses into a place 'that encourages one to be the person he is with greater ease than the other parts of the city.' Inevitably, concrete reality evaporates into thin air: 'One must realize that the East Village or the Lower East Side is more than a geographical location – it is a state of mind.'[46]

It was not simply the gradual cooptation of the underground counterculture of the 1960s and '70s. What Deutsche and Gendel Ryan highlighted was also an aesthetic turn. Far from transforming the anti-gentrification conflict into an obscurantist anti-art movement, it is important to denounce how the molecular dimension of art is affected by molar pressures and political context. The rise of the gentrification

of the Lower East Side followed the rise of neoexpressionism, as the Whitney Museum exhibition *Minimalism to Expressionism* declared in 1983.

> Would this cooperation between the art scene and a process like gentrificaton have been so easily achieved in the past? Throughout the '60s and '70s significant art, beginning with minimalism, was oriented toward an awareness of context. Among the radical results of this orientation were art practices that intervened directly in their institutional and social environments. While a number of artists today continue contextualist practices that demonstrate an understanding of the material bases of cultural production, they are a minority in a period of reaction. The specific form this reaction takes in the art world is an unapologetic embrace of commercialism, opportunism, and a concomitant rejection of the radical art practices of the past twenty years. The art establishment has resurrected the doctrine that aestheticism and self-expression are the proper concerns of art and that they constitute realms of experience divorced from the social. This doctrine is embodied in a dominant neoexpressionism which, despite its pretensions to pluralism, must be understood as a system of rigid and restrictive beliefs: in the primacy of the self existing prior to and independently of society; in an eternal conflict, outside of history, between the individual and society; in the efficacy of individualized, subjective protest. The participants in the East Village scene serve this triumphant reaction. But the victory of neoexpressionism and its East Village variant, like the victory of all reactions, depends on a lie in order to validate itself, in this case the lie that neoexpressionism is exciting, new and liberating.[47]

Despite its malicious abuses, the artistic mode of production is simply a partial component of a broader *biopolitical mode of production*, whose contradictions are not easy to escape. A component of the more general *collective symbolic capital*, the artistic mode of production is one of the new biopolitical apparatuses of capitalist accumulation. *Biopolitical* since the life and the desires of the old and new inhabitants are involved in the production of a collective subjectivity.

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The Dispositifs of the Factory of Culture

Once the general mode of production of the *metropolitan factory* has been clarified, more specific models, grammars and concretions of the current cultural economy need to be introduced. Recently, many key-words have been shaped after the popular notions of 'creativity' and 'commons'. The aforementioned 1998 definition of Creative Industries by the task force established by Tony Blair stated: 'Those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.' Alternatively, Richard Florida's epidemic of 'creative economy' is based on the exploitation of the cultural capital of a given city as a driver of economic growth. Essentially, Florida addresses a simplistic progressive political agenda with no acknowledgement of the exploitive sides of such a process. Close to this model, but more in the tradition of North-European social democracies, the Dutch policies of *cultural breeding grounds* have been used in a more complex manner as a strategy to legalize the squat movement, support the art scene and even to promote city marketing and the brand of Amsterdam as a 'creative city'.

Likewise, in the online world, the rise of the digital culture has introduced specific models of the cultural economy, often with idealistic aspirations. In the previous chapter, the Creative Commons initiative was criticized for not subscribing a productive concept of the commons, but a purely *digitalist* imaginary notion of economy. Against the 'creative commons', the political project of 'autonomous commons' has been imagined as a proper productive model that may allow a personal wage and affect the material dimension of economic life. The other side of the *immaterial* Creative Commons is indeed the very *material* economic rent applied over the spaces, media and infrastructures that makes digital sharing possible. The widely discussed 'alternative compensation systems' scarcely addresses the exploitation of cultural capital and collective intelligence by private profits. If 'autonomous commons' have been developed to confront the fictitious Creative Commons, we could imagine autonomous 'Social Industries' as competing against the Creative Industries. Here, wealth would be produced at the level of human-size markets with no space for the capital accumulation of 'anti-markets' (as Braudel defines capitalism against the scale of the small producers).[48]

The Social Industries may be considered one of the economic models of the 'social factory', when it begins to self-organize its autonomous production. In opposition to the Creative Industries, the Social Industries are not based on the exploitation of intellectual property but on the economy of material and productive commons.

The concepts of Creative Industries, creative economy, Creative Commons, 'cultural breeding places', along with the alternative proposals for autonomous commons and Social Industries, represent an initial conceptual map of the *dispositifs* of the 'factory of culture'. This effort is aimed at making the invisible architecture of the cultural economy finally emerge over the skyline of the metropolis.

Gentrification can be understood today as the best example of the asymmetrical relation and rupture between the cultural sphere and the material sphere. However, gentrification is a purely dynamic process, so it follows the unpredictable animal spirits of the market. A process of *degentrification* might even occur, when urban areas do not respond to speculative attempts and for different reasons return to their original status. Some districts of Berlin, like Mitte for example, have undergone a very slow gentrification process that at a certain point looked like it was going to turn back. In any case, the whole art of gentrification is based on deception. From the point of view of real estate, there is no romanticism of place. The proper revenues are made by the owners selling to the newcomers at the top of the curve of speculation, when the rent gap is the highest. The marketing strategies and the inoculation of artificial symbolic capital are only aimed at clearing properties when the gap is favourable, and not a moment later. Behind the big PR campaigns of the @22 plan in Barcelona or the Media Spree project in Berlin, there clearly lies the wisdom of a good deal at the right time. Gentrification is a temporary, highly dynamic phenomenon, involved in a vortex of capital that leaves as soon as possible for another land of profit. Gentrification is based on *collective belief* and, in this sense, may represent a trap of activists and resistant residents when they do believe the hype. One of the contradictions of the fictitious dimension of cognitive capitalism is precisely that resistance can bring energy to the accumulation of attention and symbolic capital. Everybody has realized the grammar of gentrification from Berlin to Barcelona. However, common knowledge still finds it difficult to say: 'The price of our house rent is ris-

ing simply because we produce the value of the district where we live.' There is nothing more 'biopolitical' than that; once symbolic capital is accumulated, it is quite difficult to be de-accumulated.

In the current discourse on gentrification, the complicit role of activists and artists in the process is often debated. Gentrification becomes *gentrifiction*: it works because even activists believe in it (and here the risk of a postmodern impasse is clear). The trap of gentrification (and especially of gentrification theory itself) is precisely one of the many fictitious dimensions of capitalism. However, degentrification can similarly be triggered as a self-fulfilling prophecy, a buzz released through the mediascape as a guerrilla marketing strategy. In general, gentrification on a broad scale cannot be stopped; it is simply a transient state in the flow of capital. Like the common, it is a gradual process of accumulation that has to be dynamically confronted. It can only be modulated, challenged on the plane of valorization, or occasionally reversed through degentrification: a mere reactive form of activism may end up being countereffective (in the form of a predictable and polite street protest, for instance). Many forms of resistance are unconsciously complicit with the accumulation they are supposed to be fighting. How can they be recognized? The very move specular to the accumulation of symbolic capital is a gesture of *productive sabotage*, a counter-*dispositif* affecting exchange-value and surplus-value, not simply a gesture of spectacular resistance. The 'creative destruction' of value performed by the stock markets can be reversed into the 'creative sabotage' of the multitudes, where actually the value is not *destroyed* but positively *produced* and *redistributed*.

Be Uncreative: Linguistic Games on the Surface of the Metropolis

What are the political responses to the biopolitical machine of the 'creative city' and the business of gentrification? Lacking a conceptual toolbox and new clear political practices, activism and academia have barely managed to extend beyond the usual 'art of complaining' – in other words, the renowned attitude of complaining about neoliberal cultural industries without providing any punctual counterdescription of the economic model behind them. In particular, a significant proportion of Northern European radical thought and social-democratic discourse seems to be still monopolized by the claustrophobic and implosive argument of postmodernism. The basic diagram of this psychopa-

thology states: any kind of political resistance reinforces the dominant code. Following a similarly superficial argument, the BAVO collective dismisses, for instance, the notion of multitude advanced by Negri and Hardt in *Empire (*as *any* other political effort can equally be dismissed):

> The multitude, they argue, is the new revolutionary subject, and in its struggle it should not relate itself too closely to the existing political channels or economic systems. By realising its own desires in the first place, sooner or later it will effortlessly make the existing order superfluous and irrelevant. This oppositional strategy sounds great, and yet it is naive. It does not see how, in practice, subversive, creative actions that situate themselves miles away from political, ideological or economic games and do their own thing precisely confirm the dominant discourse about the creative city.[49]

Interestingly, BAVO locates the concept of multitude (and, supposedly, its forerunner as the 'diffuse social factory') far from contemporary 'economic games' or institutions. However, on the contrary, the Franco-Italian political thought of the last decades managed at least to propose an articulated set of concepts (immaterial labour, affective labour, biopolitical production, cognitive capitalism, a new theory of rent, etcetera) that provide an economic understanding of post-Fordism that is far deeper and more comprehensive than the linguistic analysis offered by Žižekian and Lacanian scholars.

Accordingly, to escape the trap of the injunction of creativity, the BAVO collective has launched a 'plea for an uncreative city' in one of their texts.[50] *Be uncreative* is their motto: paradoxically, it is such a political imperative that seems to remain within the diagram of the ideology of creativity and to reinforce its language. Then *Žižekianism* can be defined as a critique of capitalist ideology based on psycholinguistic analysis alone, an approach that does not provide any model of the surplus economy running behind *any* phantasmagoria. The only elaborated political gesture advanced by BAVO corresponds to the same symptoms under critique through the strategy of *over-identification,*[51] an effective approach pioneered by legendary art groups like Laibach and NSK within the socialist ideology of former Yugoslavia, or today by the Yes Men targeting international corporations and organizations such as

the WTO. These practices, however, remain at the level of media activism, or at the level of the PR campaign of the anti-globalist movement. If contemporary Autonomist Marxism is to be criticized, it should be in terms of requiring an even deeper economic insight, a more rigorous analysis of the asymmetries of cognitive capitalism, a more grounded theory, not a more *linguistic* or *mediatic* one. This critique also involves the definition of artivism (art as a medium of a political content) that is running the risk of remaining at the level of a linguistic game too. Most likely, there is no longer an *outside*, but the *inside* is still complex, obscure and dense with asymmetries, frictions and conflicts. The only way to reverse the 'creative city' is to catch the material undercurrents of surplus in the metropolis and re-engineer them.

The Grammar of Sabotage and the Institution of the Common

The radical-chic motto *be uncreative* is unconvincing not simply because it reinforces the basic grammar of institutional 'creativity' – censoring the biopolitical ground that is the *life producing the city* (before it is turned into business) may actually result in dangerous self-mutilation. 'Uncreativity' should instead focus on the productive expanding front of the process; on tracking, claiming back or sabotaging the energy put to work for the cultural industry. It is not a matter of being *uncreative*, but of not being committed enough. The crucial aspect of cognitive capitalism is that value accumulation does not work like energy or commodity accumulation: once symbolic capital is produced and accumulated, it cannot easily be *un*-produced and *de*-accumulated. Once a brand has attained visibility, even in the case of a bad reputation, that exposure cannot be annihilated. And once collective knowledge has been spontaneously condensed and fixed around a specific object (like a Free Software program) or a place (like a new hip district), it can be exploited by commercial initiatives with no need for brutal enclosures. Nevertheless, it is quite common today to hear an uncritical celebration of 'network cooperation' under the slogan 'information is non-rival'. The intellectuals of Free Culture describe the sphere of knowledge and culture as non-competitive, but without mentioning how value and wealth are extracted from that sphere and by whom. The slogan 'information is non-rival' has a doppelgänger: accumulation of information on the one side feeds the economic rent on the other. The multitudes

of the metropolis live, work and produce value along the frictions and asymmetries of the commons. It is the evidence of a biopolitical routine: the immaterial commons are used to reinforce the material enclosures. According to Walter Benjamin at the end of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Representation':

> Fascism attempts to organise the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property.[52]

Be creative! But never touch private property! The hidden injunction to creativity may be condensed in this slogan. And conversely: *Be uncreative as much as you want! But never touch private property!* In such a Balkanized scenario, how can the accumulation of cultural capital exploited by gentrification, and by the diffuse culture industries, be politically affected? At first glance, as the economist Enzo Rullani has it (see the previous chapter), only entropy affects the economy of knowledge: cultural capital becomes obsolete and out of date in the long term, but in the short term it is difficult to confront its accumulation. Resistance against the capitalism of the spectacle is hard, precisely because there is no room for the *negation* of visibility. Within the knowledge society and cognitive capitalism, resistance is weak not only because it confirms a 'dominant discourse', but specifically because it brings energy and attention to a symbolic accumulation that is difficult to reverse. The question then is not being *uncreative*, but how to *unproduce* and *deaccumulate* the symbolic, cultural and biopolitical capital that is exploited, in this case, by the immaterial factory of the 'creative city' and by the business of gentrification.

If the conflictive nature of metropolitan forms of life is taken as a material and scientific fact (against the ideological neutralization of political subjects carried on by global academia), the lifecycle of the factory of culture can be described in a clearer way. To reverse and reclaim the value of collective symbolic capital means to consider the profound asymmetry between the cultural domain and the material economy: value is accumulated on the immaterial level but the profits are made on the

material one. Resistance then is practiced not on the level of symbolic representation, but along the link of value production. The reversed form of the *accumulation of symbolic capital* is a new *grammar of sabotage*, where this mode of 'sabotage' is productive of value and *creative*, not simply destructive. Such *positive sabotage* is not a form of Luddism – it is impossible to destroy the machine, as we ourselves have now become the machine. Indeed, the real-estate market and the speculative trends of gentrification are a sort of stock exchange: a sphere of information and expectations, desires and monetary values that is constantly in fluctuation and in competition. The best example of *productive sabotage* is the fall of a share value on the stock exchange under unexpected external circumstances or because of market speculation, to remind us that a big part of the exchange-value of a commodity is purely a 'consensual hallucination'. The media reports a drop on the stock market as a loss of value, but actually, that value is not destroyed exactly, just no longer allocated to that specific share. It is the happy-go-lucky cynicism of stock market and specifically the current financial crises that suggest the practice of the *productive sabotage*. And if there is no longer an *outside*, then there will only be space for a sort of *internal sabotage*.

Productive sabotage does not aim for another imaginary of resistance but to *negative symbolic capital*: not imaginaries of riot (good for new advertisement campaigns), but riots of imaginary to reduce prices and to make specific urban areas unfriendly to capital colonization. Where are the examples of this kind of sabotage? If the construction of a museum in a specific urban area raises land value, does the 'character assassination' or the *symbolic demolition* of the museum itself re-establish the previous conditions? Physical actions targeting buildings or other material assets during the anti-gentrification struggles in Europe and North-America may have produced a negative accumulation of symbolic value and weakened the general capital, but they have also woken the 'revanchist city' and its securitarian policies. Indeed, many people evicted by the foreclosure after the 2008 subprime crisis deliberately damaged their previous houses to additionally drop the property value as much as possible. It is, however, quite rare that metropolitan activism in the form of random vandalism hits the collective dimension of value properly. Still, the metropolis must be understood as an 'imaginary of concrete', a shared space that is collectively being shaped.

Meanwhile, a more stringent example of an assault on collective value is the metropolitan strike. In Negri's description of the strike of Seville, it is not that a specific segment of the working class goes on strike, but that the whole 24-hour life of the city becomes suspended. The metropolitan strike affects and reverses the production of value throughout the city as we know it.

> [We] regard the metropolitan strike as the specific form of recompo-
> sition of the multitude in the metropolis. The metropolitan strike
> is not a socialisation of the working class strike: it is a new form of
> counter power.... Metropolitan revolts do not pose the question
> of substituting a mayor: they express new forms of democracy and
> schemes other than those of control. Metropolitan revolt is always
> a refoundation of the city.... The freedom of the metropolis stems
> from the building and rebuilding that it carries out on itself day by
> day; the 'general strike' is inserted in this framework. It is the pro-
> longing or rather the manifestation or revelation of what is alive in
> the depth of the city.... However, what we want to underline is that
> the 'general strike' is a kind of radical excavation in the life of the
> metropolis: its productive structure and its common.[53]

When the metropolitan strike occurs, it may affect the material flows of value, the movements of real-estate speculation and collective symbolic capital. The metropolitan strike is, in this sense, productive of value and effective if it manages to influence the economic rent applied over the living skin of the multitude. The event of the metropolitan strike is a new typology of conflict rising across Europe. As the EuroMayDay managed to produce a unified imaginary out of the precarious workers, so the urban struggles against gentrification are about to recognize each other – not in the form of another political spectacle, but to share their grammars of sabotage in order to coordinate an assault on the accu-mulation of symbolic capital. This new kind of mobilization is calling upon all forms of life of the metropolis, even if a direct involvement of cultural producers and a new alliance between the old categories of art-ists and activists represent a crucial and yet unresolved node.

This form of sabotage is supposed to be immediately productive and constituent of the common, as the value-chain of rent is weakened and

value is reallocated in favour of its producers. Like the 'creative destruction' played by stock markets, productive sabotage specifically targets the contemporary processes of valorization and financialization. General rent, rather than private property, is therefore the immediate target for this sort of general sabotage. The notion of productive sabotage functions along a dystopian and disenchanted notion of the commons. The commons is always material, multiple and its political potential is always different: the commons of land and water are different from the commons of culture, memory and imaginary. Very different kinds of commons interact with each other and are composed of contradictions, frictions and cooptation. Between the level of the commons and other forms, there are lines of asymmetry, exploitation and conflict. For example, as shown in the previous chapter, the hyper-celebrated Creative Commons are not a genuine commons at all since they are not *productive*. The original definition of commons was used for a common land, a resource that was directly and clearly *productive*. And as was shown in the case of the relation between the cultural industry and the city, the immaterial commons (that is the production of imagery and symbolic capital) can be used to reinforce material enclosures.

Which spaces of the commons are produced and contested today? Establishing a bridge between Anglo-American and Continental tradition, it could be paradoxically claimed that the *commons* (traditionally tied to a local community) is the singular practical manifestation of the more general and ambitious *common* (expression of the multitude). Furthermore, discrete strata of the 'plane of immanence' and different concretions of the common should be distinguished from each other (following Deleuze and Guattari, and later DeLanda's *geological philosophy*). Urban and land commons, technological and biological commons, cultural and symbolic commons: it is time to articulate the *art of the common* across a diverse and manifold matter. The space of the common cannot be celebrated without recognizing the vortexes of surplus accumulation raging around it. Specifically, a new dystopian grammar of the commons of culture is required against the symmetrical, metaphysical and utopian notion of cultural capital and collective intellect. A forceful definition is needed: the common is dynamically produced and defended, it does not exist as a static and generic form.

An autonomist reading of the link between self-valorization and sab-
otage was already introduced by Negri in the 1970s. Sabotage was then
the 'negative power of the positive' (which can also be properly defined
as the 'positive power of the negative').

> Proletarian self-valorization is sabotage. How does this project be-
> come concrete? The leap from the phenomenological revelation of
> our separate existence to the expansion of the force of the process of
> self-valorization is organized around a method of social transforma-
> tion which is immediately a method of new knowledge. The deter-
> minate objective of the process is to increase the use value of labor,
> against its capitalist subsumption, against its commodification,
> against its reduction to a use value of capital.[54]

In the 1970s, sabotage for Negri was a 'fundamental key' for unveiling
the crisis of the law of value and for understanding the self-valorization
and autonomy of yesterday's working class (and today's multitudes).
Capitalism has repeated the *crisis* ever since; Negri's words prophetically
resound when the machine of exploitation turns to a network in which
the main goal is to make sabotage more difficult, if not impossible.

> The form capitalist domination is disintegrating before our eyes. The
> machinery of power is breaking down. *Sabotage follows the heels of the irra-
> tionality of capital, and dictates the forms and rhythms of its further disorganisa-
> tion.* The capitalist world reveals itself to us for what it is: once a machine
> for grinding our surplus-value, it has now become a net thrown down to
> block the workers' sabotage. But it is a net that is already too frayed.[55]

The 'creative destruction' of value performed by multitudinal sabotage
can be understood as a positive gesture that produces and defends the
common against the new anonymous networks of capitalist rent, finan-
cialization and a neo-feudal society. As a living organism, the metropo-
lis can protect itself from the inside by its metabolism of value. Cultural
production and symbolic capital then become an interesting matter
and an animated battlefield, only when their relation with the material
economy is revealed and confronted – when the living metropolis fi-
nally reclaims its rights over the fragile chimera of the 'creative city'.

Chapter IV

The Bicephalous Image:
The Just Masochism of the Imaginary

Today, in the era of the complete triumph of the spectacle, what can be reaped from the heritage of Debord? It is clear that the spectacle is language, the very communicativity or linguistic being of humans. This means that a fuller Marxian analysis should deal with the fact that capitalism (or any other name one wants to give the process that today dominates world history) was directed not only toward the expropriation of productive activity, but also and principally toward the alienation of language itself, of the very linguistic and communicative nature of humans, of that logos which one of Heraclitus' fragments identified as the Common. The extreme form of this expropriation of the Common is the spectacle, that is, the politics we live in. But this also means that in the spectacle of our own linguistic nature comes back to us inverted. This is why (precisely because what is being expropriated is the very possibility of common good) the violence of the spectacle is so destructive; but for the same reason the spectacle remains something like a positive possibility that can be used against it. For this very reason, however, the era in which we live is also that in which for the first time it is possible for humans to experience their own linguistic being – not this or that content of language, but language itself, not this or that true proposition, but the very fact that one speaks. Contemporary politics is this devastating *experimentum linguae* that all over the planet unhinges and empties traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities. Only those who succeed in carrying it to completion – without allowing what reveals to remain veiled in the nothingness that reveals, but bringing language itself to language – will be the first citizens of a community with neither presuppositions nor a State, where the nullifying and determining power of what is common will be pacified and where the Shekinah will have stopped sucking the evil milk of its own separation.
Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*

Neurology and Profanation of the Optical Unconscious

> Fiction is a branch of neurology: the scenarios of nerve and blood vessel are the written mythologies of memory and desire.
> James G. Ballard, *Ambit* magazine[1]

The Bicephalous Image: Questioning the Autonomy of the Imaginary

If there is no longer any outside, as the saying goes, the inside of the collective imaginary is a bicephalous monster – the symptom of a silent and invisible inner *separation* of desire and phantasy, life and 'spectacle' that has haunted Western culture for centuries, including its heretic avant-gardes. After questioning the political autonomy of digital networks and of the new 'creative cities' in previous chapters, the focus now shifts towards scrutinizing the sphere of the collective imaginary, and aesthetic production more generally, in terms of its own syndromes of separation. As mentioned previously, the political isolation of art is a recurring issue of our time, despite the *creativity-for-all* manifestos of the historical avant-gardes and the actual massification of digital media, it returns to us, for instance, through caricature-like attempts at *artivism* (art imitating the political). In a similar way, the new socialite philosophers are used to take the collective imaginary of Western society as a kind of gigantic cinema screen to be isolated and analysed only in its *ideological contradictions*. Like art, collective imaginary is supposed to enjoy the pacific one-dimensional life of any petty bourgeois representation. Meanwhile, on the dark side of the global imagery, a new generation of very material *animal spirits* is rising, being incarnated in forms of Internet pornography, war imagery and video terrorism. Yet there is no *Pervert's Guide* available for such a 'cinema'.[2] The politics of the image is still simply discussed through intimist discourses good for art biennales or the reassuring nihilist interpretations of postmodernism (from the early Baudrillard of simulacra to the late Žižek of language games). The abyss of the immaterial deserves further exploration. Instead of cutting off the head of *logos*, like Bataille's *acephal*, the *bicephalous* complexity of desire must be fully recognized as we immerse ourselves in the waters of the collective imaginary.

Similarly to the notion of network, the modern destiny of the image has been polarized and neutralized across two main concepts: *code* and *flow* – in a very general way, also the recent aesthetics of new media art can be summarized in the dialectics around these two poles (reminiscent of the 1970s' debate mentioned earlier: *production* versus *representation*). The notion of image as *code* inherits the modern gnosis of collective intelligence and hacker culture, passing through the postmodern cult of simulacra. Indeed, today's entropy of the image is the result of the infinite reproducibility of digital media and the hegemony of the database form (exemplified, for instance, by large platforms for image-sharing such as YouTube and Flickr). Conversely, flow appears as the bastard heir of post-Structuralism, in particular Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of desire. Visual images are, as a consequence, treated as an endless 'flow' of matter across the machinic biosphere. Tracking this impasse back through various philosophical debates, the work of Baudrillard in the early 1970s represents a key genealogical turning point. For instance, with the conceptual series *production-commodity-fetishism-value-sign-code-image-simulacra*, Baudrillard only emphasized the end of the sequence, irreversibly severing any organic relation of the image with the body and the productive substratum. On the one hand, the modern conception of the image has not survived this postmodern nihilism, especially combined with the entropic effects of digital media; nor, on the other hand, the ideology of network cooperation and the *productivist* critique of logocentrism. Behind this *digital theatre*, libidinal impulses have nevertheless been actively at work. After years of theoretical neglect and disengagement, the body and nerves that constitute 'simulacra' are waiting to be rewarded.

To describe the image as bicephalous, however, is not to invoke another abstract binary, but to recognize the complex everyday experience of desire in the mediasphere (both heads of the *bicephalous* being are intricately held together). At stake is the libidinal *dispositif* internal to images, the same ambivalent *dispositif* that constitutes the fetishism of the commodity, of technology and digital code. The sphere of the collective imaginary, like the sphere of cultural production, must be considered an extension of our animal instincts, an excess or surplus of energy. What might sound like an excerpt from a novel by Ballard is indeed consistent with the perspective of Marxist philosophers such

as Virno. However, the image, in the form of visual media and the collective imaginary, has a different (political) status compared to the accumulation of knowledge through digital networks. To put it bluntly, Wikipedia is to collective intelligence as YouTube is to the collective imaginary. Through social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, moreover, media corporations have managed to harness a *horizontally* produced imaginary after cultivating the global *vertical* mediascape for years. What is the relation between the collective imaginary and the collaborative creation of knowledge over the Net? If the latter has now become the standard political model for a diverse range of thinkers from various disciplinary traditions (to the extent of the so-called 'Californization of Continental thought'), the former is certainly not taken as a form of 'collective intelligence', since it easily expresses the wild nature of the digital multitude. If the word *theory* etymologically shares the same root of *theatre* in ancient Greek, symbolically linking the brain and the eye, today's spectacle (freed from *logos*) is the direct expression of animal instincts. The collective imaginary gathered in the Internet underground more accurately resembles an extension of an animal body than a rational mind.

The bicephalous image only reveals itself clearly through the collective dimension of the imaginary – twofold, since it speaks both to the individual and the collective (no *image* without an *imaginary*), to both manifest and latent content, as Ballard observes. It was the introduction of new mimetic machines like the camera, according to Benjamin, that made possible this surfacing of the 'optical unconscious' at the beginning of the twentieth century.

> Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. . . . The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is a familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, it extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.[3]

More recently, by linking Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious to the mimetic practices of animism, Michael Taussig has demonstrated how it is possible to establish a *carnal* theory of the imaginary. In his book *Mimesis and Alterity* the understanding of the mediascape remains decidedly non-linguistic and non-postmodern. For Taussig, the optical unconscious provides evidence of the return of the 'primitive' within modernity, that is, a return of the animist image.[4] He describes the animistic power of the modern imaginary in its evolution from photography and cinema to television, and it is advertising, in particular, that provides 'the everyday schooling for the mimetic faculty, even more so than film'.[5] The exploration initiated by Benjamin, therefore, must be continued, especially in terms of the cameraman as surgeon, entering the body of the optical unconscious.[6] According to Benjamin, the restoration of political agency in the present can only occur from the space of the collective imaginary, from its manifest and latent economies, from the innervation of the collective body with the new technologies of image.

> Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tensions becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*.[7]

'Fiction is a Branch of Neurology'

The novels of Ballard can describe the nature of technology and the contemporary mediascape better than any philosopher, media theorist or cultural studies academic. During the mass-media revolution, while spectres of the collective imaginary were flourishing on everybody's television screens in a genuine 'atrocity exhibition', both academic and radical theorists were imploding in the *semiotics of the image*: postmodernism indeed reduced the image to a *linguistic sign*. Ballard and other science-fiction writers, meanwhile, were left alone to map the new becoming of the media unconscious. In retrospect, it is increasingly apparent how the postmodern agenda and the *church of simulacra* functioned as an immunization strategy of an armchair intelligentsia against the monsters emerging from the collective Id.

Ironically, the notion of 'collective unconscious' can itself be interpreted as a high-culture sanitization attempt of what was visibly and consciously intensifying at the core of mass-media society: *libido*. As much as Deleuze and Guattari recognized that delirium is always social, political and historical (something not simply isolated to the morbid intimacy of a psychoanalyst's couch), Ballard understood that 'after Freud's exploration within the psyche it is now the outer world of reality which must be quantified and eroticised'.[8] Significantly, he began his cartography of the *machinic unconscious* of the West outside the mediated discourses of philosophy and psychoanalysis. His context was the American cultural imaginary of the 1950s and '60s that colonized the European psyche by broadcasting morbid televisual images of John Kennedy's assassination, Marilyn Monroe's second lives, the Vietnam War and so on. At the time of May '68, Ballard's own personal 'counter-culture' was on the other side of the barricades, on the side of power and mass media, where he discovered far stronger and more lysergic forces than in any leftist movement. From this science-fiction perspective on the mainstream, Ballard effectively anticipated the Guattarian *schizo-analysis* of the collective *machinic unconscious.*

For an accurate introduction of the Ballardian universe, however, it may be useful to make a comparison with a sparring partner from the postmodern school. Baudrillard, once more, is worth considering for his review of *Crash*, where Ballard's uncanny worlds are sanitized through the theoretical frame of Simulation.[9] His review twisted the novel's carnal tangle into a 'semiurgy of the body' (*semiurgy* being the trendy neologism introduced by postmodernism for 'the art of creating new signs'). Amusingly, Ballard would dismiss this postmodern critique of his writing as 'the apotheosis of the hamburger'.[10] In a society increasingly exposed to mass media, Baudrillard is an obvious symptom of *iconophilia* turned to *iconophobia*.

From the classical (and even the cybernetic) viewpoint, technology is an extension of the body. . . . From Marx to McLuhan, one sees the same instrumentalist vision of machines and of language: relays, extensions, media-mediators of a Nature destined ideally to become the organic body. In this 'rational' view, the body itself is only a medium. Inversely, in its baroque and apocalyptic treatment in Crash, technology is the deadly deconstruction of the body – no longer a functional

medium, but an extension of death: ... all the metallurgy of accidents is inscribed in a semiurgy of the body – not in anatomy or physiology, but in a semiurgy of contusions, scars, mutilations, and wounds which are like new sexual organs opened in the body.[11]

Baudrillard interprets Ballard's *death of affect* as the postmodern haze through which everything is grey and desire is lacking. On the contrary, the *death of affect* actually marks an intensified longing or love for the inorganic; otherwise Ballard's 'erotization' of the 'outer world' would not be intelligible. In particular, the sophisticated relation between violence, libido and machine signals a notion of desire that is not unfamiliar within the intellectual account of masochism and the BDSM subcultures of the last decades.

> In Crash, there is neither fiction nor reality – a kind of hyper-reality has abolished both. Even critical regression is no longer possible. This mutating and commutating world of simulation and death, this violently sexualized world totally lacking in desire, full of violent and violated bodies but curiously neutered, this chromatic and intensely metallic world empty of the sensorial, a world of hyper-technology without finality.[12]

Baudrillard's *hyper(flat)-reality* clearly disappointed Ballard. While for Ballard, 'fiction is a branch of neurology', Baudrillard annexed his novel to the realm of simulacra, unequivocally stating that 'Crash is the first great novel of the universe of simulation, the world that we will be dealing with from now on'. In a completely opposite reading, William Burroughs wrote in the introduction to *The Atrocity Exhibition*: 'The line between inner and outer landscapes is breaking down. Earthquakes can result from seismic upheavals within the human mind.' By illuminating the 'death of affect', Burroughs effectively underlines how 'sexual arousal results from the repetition and impact of image'. Ballard's novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* is indeed a sincere anti-postmodern manifesto.

'Neuronic Icons on the Spinal Highway'

Ballard's iconology is not concerned with a flat image framed according to academic coordinates, but it is a journey into the subterra-

nean world beyond that surface. Rather than being purely a linguistic sign, Ballard's image is part of the collapse between 'inner and outer landscapes'. A recurring codeword in *The Atrocity Exhibition* is 'spinal': images have nerves, they become part of the nervous system. Like Leroi-Gourhan's anthropology, the medium of technology is an extension of the human skeleton, not a self-indulgent eye.[13] The aesthetics of the contemporary image cannot be found through its metaphysical fabric, in the claustrophobic white cube of the art world or the minimal semiotics of the digital screen, but precisely in the externalization of the nervous system.

> [In] *The Atrocity Exhibition*, the nervous systems of the characters have been externalized, as part of the reversal of the interior and exterior worlds. Highways, office blocks, faces and street signs are perceived as if they were elements in a malfunctioning central nervous system.[14]

Images are 'neuronic icons on the spinal highway', signs of a biomorphic unconscious lurking beneath the urban landscape. The diagram of these icons is a 'neural interval' in the physiology of the body. In other words, the *neural space* we enter with Ballard is not the reassuring social democracy of psychoanalysis, but the 'spinal battlefield' of contemporary warfare, the space of the Third World War and of Foucauldian 'biopolitical conflicts'. Ballard has in effect inaugurated a *neurospace* – a carnal and physical understanding of the mediascape that only many decades later will surface from the underworld of cyberspace. Ballard's neurospace, however, should not be considered an autonomous media sphere, but a continuum between inner and outer landscapes, between the psychological and libidinal life of any physical form and object. 'The blitzkriegs will be fought out on the spinal battlefields, in terms of the postures we assume, of our traumas mimetized in the angle of a wall or balcony.'[15]

To consider *The Atrocity Exhibition* as a manual for the contemporary collective imaginary, another lesson is worth remembering: the *image is always social and collective*, and the figures of the collective imaginary are always 'giants'. The image by nature is socially expansive, 'commercial cosmologies' covering the unconscious of the nation. Even as early

as the 1920s, Benjamin took note of the 'huge images across the walls of the houses, where toothpaste and cosmetics lie handy for giants'.[16] The conceptual origin of the 'mediascape' can be traced back to this particular skyline of huge advertisements, a commercial landscape of billboards associated with the American horizon of the 1950s. In two famous cryptic fragments, Ballard spreads a giant pornographic picture of Elizabeth Taylor across hundreds of such billboards.

> A group of workmen on a scaffolding truck were pasting up the last of the displays, a hundred-foot-long panel that appeared to represent a section of a sand-dune. Looking at it more closely, Dr Nathan realized that in fact it was an immensely magnified portion of the skin over the iliac crest. Glancing at the billboards, Dr Nathan recognized other magnified fragments: a segment of lower lip, a right nostril, a portion of female perineum. Only an anatomist would have identified these fragments, each represented as a formal geometric pattern. At least five hundred of the signs would be needed to contain the whole of this gargantuan woman, terraced here into a quantified sand-sea.[17]

> Dr Nathan limped along the drainage culvert, peering at the huge figure of a dark-haired woman painted on the sloping walls of the blockhouse. The magnification was enormous. The wall on his right, the size of a tennis court, contained little more than the right eye and cheekbone. He recognized the woman from the billboards he had seen near the hospital – the screen actress, Elizabeth Taylor. Yet these designs were more than enormous replicas. They were equations that embodied the relationship between the identity of the film actress and the audiences who were distant reflections of her. The planes of their lives interlocked at oblique angles, fragments of personal myths fusing with the commercial cosmologies. The presiding deity of their lives the film actress provided a set of operating formulae for their passage through consciousness.[18]

In these two passages, Ballard deconstructs a sample of the collective imaginary (the archetypical 1950s' movie star), stripping the image back to its fundamental components. First, its infrastructural medium:

the skeleton of scaffoldings and billboards that turns a pop star into architecture. Second, its picture as replica: a sensuous module of a benevolent propaganda machine. Third, its pornographic focus: intimate details of the body that fall under the public eye and become part of public constructions. Fourth, the sexual nature of such an apparently neutral magnification: perineum and ileum are the scientific names for the anatomic zones where the male gaze is usually drawn. Fifth, its sexualized body is exploded into different fragments and patterns. Sixth, those replicated fragments function together as a collective image over the unconscious domain, as 'a set of operating formulae for their passage through consciousness', 'equations that embodied the relationship between the identity of the film actress and the audiences who were distant reflections of her'. No other description could provide a better diagram of the basic elements of the mediascape.

Ballard is not the first writer to investigate the intoxicating effect of mass-media society, but he is exceptional for offering a detailed mapping of its unconscious parallel dimension. Ballard attempts to reveal the existence of a 'second narrative' behind the official version of events, and how the collective consciousness produces 'emergency scenarios', as in dreams, to face the violent stimuli emanating from the mediascape. For Ballard, the collective imaginary is a bicephalous entity that simultaneously maintains contradictory meanings and dimensions.

The media landscape of the present day is a map in search of a territory. A huge volume of sensational and often toxic imagery inundates our minds, much of it fictional in content. How do we make sense of this ceaseless flow of advertising and publicity, news and entertainment, where presidential campaigns and moon voyages are presented in terms indistinguishable from the launch of a new candy bar or deodorant? What actually happens on the level of our unconscious minds when, within minutes on the same TV screen, a prime minister is assassinated, an actress makes love, an injured child is carried from a car crash? Faced with these charged events, prepackaged emotions already in place, we can only stitch together a set of emergency scenarios, just as our sleeping minds extemporize a narrative from the unrelated memories that veer through the cortical night. In the waking dream that now constitutes everyday reality, im-

ages of a blood-spattered widow, the chromium trim of a limousine windshield, the stylized glamour of a motorcade, fuse together to provide a secondary narrative with very different meanings.[19]

Against the contemporary dismissal of the notion of unconscious (but actually of its metaphysical and linguistic interpretations), Ballard identifies a clear energetic undercurrent behind the mediascape and the surrounding biosphere of machines. To confront this new environment, he appropriates the notion of latent and manifest content from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and applies it to external reality. According to Ballard, beneath the 'benign or passive posture' of machinic civilization and consumerist society resides a latent energy, 'ambiguous even to the skilled investigator'.

> From this and similar work it is clear that Freud's classic distinction between the manifest and latent content of the inner world of the psyche now has to be applied to the outer world of reality. A dominant element in this reality is technology and its instrument, the machine. In most roles the machine assumes a benign or passive posture – telephone exchanges, engineering hardware, etc. The twentieth century has also given birth to a vast range of machines – computers, pilotless planes, thermonuclear weapons – where the latent identity of the machine is ambiguous even to the skilled investigator. An understanding of this identity can be found in a study of the automobile, which dominates the vectors of speed, aggression, violence and desire. In particular the automobile crash contains a crucial image of the machine as conceptualized psychopathology.[20]

What is the nature of this dark side of the machinic landscape? Irrational violence, animal instincts, sexual impulses and natural aggressiveness emerge as constitutive of the 'biomorphic horror' pulsating through the collective technological imaginary. Rather than Baudrillard's imagined *society of simulacra*, the 'death of affect' is actually a consequence of the molecular dissemination of a conceptual violence that makes any object, even the most aseptic one, a vector of conflict. In this sense, the 'abstraction' of violence causes psychopathologies to become everyday playthings. The violence of *The Atrocity Exhibition* is not

comparable to, for instance, the aesthetization of sadism in Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, since the former emerges through the force of inorganic structures.[21] Just like a sophisticated philosophy of sadomaso-chism, Ballard considers the abstract psychopathologies of the mediascape 'as a game', as an intrinsic means of human communication. This intuition will be useful later when introducing the notion of *masochism of image*.

> Travers's problem is how to come to terms with the violence that has pursued his life - not merely the violence of accident and bereavement, or the horrors of war, but the biomorphic horror of our own bodies. Travers has at last realized that the real significance of these acts of violence lies elsewhere, in what we might term 'the death of affect'. Consider our most real and tender pleasures – in the excitements of pain and mutilation; in sex as the perfect arena, like a culture-bed of sterile pus, for all the veronicas of our own perversions, in voyeurism and self-disgust, in our moral freedom to pursue our own psychopathologies as a game, and in our ever greater powers of abstraction. . . . The only way we can make contact with each other is in terms of conceptualizations. Violence is the conceptualization of pain. By the same token psychopathology is the conceptual system of sex.[22]

Surprisingly, Ballard suggests his own counterstrategies for confronting the psychopathologies of the imaginary – a sort of political agenda born from the perspective of science fiction. Against both conservative puritanism and radical pessimism, against the politically correct ethos of the peace movements, Ballard professes a joyful and 'just psychopathology' as the 'final destination of the 20th century'. The only way to deal with the abyss, Ballard suggests, is to stare directly into it, immerse ourselves in the dark waters of the unconscious and 'swim'.

> Has a festival of atrocity films ever been held? Every year at the Oscars ceremony, some might say. It seemed likely in the late 60s, but the new puritans of our day would greet such a suggestion with a shudder. A pity – given the unlimited opportunities which the media landscape now offers to the wayward imagination, I feel we should

immerse ourselves in the most destructive element, ourselves, and swim. I take it that the final destination of the 20th century, and the best we can hope for in the circumstances, is the attainment of a moral and just psychopathology.[23]

'The Latent Sexual Character of the War'

The violent content of the collective unconscious is self-evident when it comes to the imaginary of war, but Ballard concentrates on the latent sexual impulse behind this scenography. The aggressive instincts of species survival that drive us to war share the same ground as reproductive impulses. War and politics – as embodiments of the species instincts – are naturally enmeshed through a subterranean libido. By introducing sex to the war imaginary (decades before the Abu Ghraib scandal), Ballard also reveals our ambivalent attitude to war: 'Far from repelling us, it appeals to us.'

> Any great human tragedy – Vietnam, let us say – can be considered experimentally as a larger model of a mental crisis mimetized in faulty stair angles or skin junctions, breakdowns in the perception of environment and consciousness. In terms of television and the news magazines the war in Vietnam has a latent significance very different from its manifest content. Far from repelling us, it appeals to us by virtue of its complex of polyperverse acts.[24]

The mediascape of war is 'a larger model of a mental crisis'; a sort of game the collective mind watches and plays; investing its libido in a 'neutral exploration of sensation'. Here, Ballard advances a conception of desire that works as an *affirmative force*, breaking through the easy binaries of Western hypocrisy (the *negative* forms of both 'war on terrorism' propaganda and 'no war' pacifism). A 'just psychopathology' has connections with the ambivalent schizophrenia of Deleuze and Guattari: it is no longer something for a minority of perverts, no longer something individual and private, but an experiment on a mass scale. Delirium is always political. The Vietnam War precisely represents a gigantic fetishistic alibi for the collective body. It is not remarkable or surprising that the majority of people are *unconsciously* obsessed by the dark imagery of the media spectacle. Instead of fighting or complain-

ing about such content in a puritanical way, like *Adbusters* magazine and other *media ecology* activists, Ballard rescues this psychopathologic obsession by welcoming the living energy that communicates with the underground of the Id.

> We must bear in mind, however sadly, that psychopathology is no longer the exclusive preserve of the degenerate and perverse. The Congo, Vietnam, Biafra – these are games that anyone can play. Their violence, and all violence for that matter, reflects the neutral exploration of sensation that is taking place now, within sex as elsewhere, and the sense that the perversions are valuable precisely because they provide a readily accessible anthology of exploratory techniques.[25]

Ballard witnesses the *positive* effects of the Vietnam media coverage on the American psyche. The Freudian *perverse polymorphism* of infantile sexuality is portrayed as a model for the libido of the whole nation, and more generally, for the collective imaginary. In psychoanalysis, polymorphous perversity is the normative libidinal condition of childhood, which is unfocused and may derive sexual pleasure from any part of the body. Similarly, all the forms of life on the mediascape, war narrative and even architectural landscapes, can be sexualized. Polymorphous perversity is as much social as individual. For example, all the sexual content we find in the media is clearly a kind of *public sex*, even if this fact is anesthetized by our distanced perception. The Vietnam War became the vector to re-establish 'a positive psychosexual relationship with the external world'. As recognized in the post-911 world, but also in ancient times, war has a distinctly cathartic role for the *libido of a nation*. From a particularly cynical perspective, war is the only way the USA can *love* the world.

> The need for more polymorphic roles has been demonstrated by television and news media. Sexual intercourse can no longer be regarded as a personal and isolated activity, but is seen to be a vector in a public complex involving automobile styling, politics and mass communications. The Vietnam war has offered a focus for a wide range of polymorphic sexual impulses, and also a means by which

the United States has re-established a positive psychosexual relation-
ship with the external world.[26] . . . only in terms of a psychosexual
module such as provided by the Vietnam war that the United States
can enter into a relationship with the world generally characterized
by the term 'love'.[27]

It may happen that the simulation of war news becomes a political ne-
cessity, as news itself has a physical and material effect on the *libidinal
economy* of the population. In a new Foucault-like paradigm, biopolitics
is nervously managed through the manipulation of the hidden content
of the mediascape. For Ballard, misinformation is not about simulation
and *regimes of truth*, like a postmodernist fable, but about the manipula-
tion of concealed dimensions. News about war has no informational
content: its aim is solely a strategic control of the collective libido. Its
power relies more on the iconic than the linguistic side of communica-
tion. Conversely, counterinformation campaigns are harmless, as they
do not contain or cover the real, hidden libidinal content.

> Psychotic patients exposed to continuous Vietnam war newsreel
> material have shown marked improvements in overall health, self-
> maintenance and ability to cope with tasks. . . . Levels of overall
> health and sexual activity fell notably, only restored by the Tet of-
> fensive and the capture of the U.S. embassy. Suggestions have been
> made for increasing the violence and latent sexuality of the war,
> and current peace moves may require the manufacture of simulated
> newsreels.[28]

Interestingly, Benjamin also emphasized the 'curative' effect or heal-
ing power of advertising: 'People whom nothing moves or touches any
longer are taught to cry again by films.'[29] And Michael Taussig after
him, in his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, similarly establishes a deep cor-
relation with curative figures of the Cuna animistic rituals: 'There is a
cathartic, even curative, function in this copy-and-contact visual tactil-
ity of the advertisement.'[30]

Ballard's most interesting account concerns peace advocates and
their *libidinal drop*: he notes that the political correctness of non-vio-
lence hides something obscure, something against its real intentions

– specifically, a fatal attraction for war. Ballard is not, of course, a war-monger, having passed two years of his childhood in a Japanese internment camp at the end of the Second World War. Rather, by going 'beyond good and evil' in a Nietzschean way, Ballard highlights the latent content of peace activism and its fascination for what it is supposed to be fighting against. The war imaginary is an alibi for the impotence – literally – of peace activists, just as dreams represent a fulfilment of libido displaced and reinvested in another form. Far from being a provocative endorsement of right-wing stereotypes, Ballard introduces an *energetic* understanding of the psychological premises of radical activism, and a totally inverted account of the rationale for political correctness.

> Further tests were devised to assess the latent sexual fantasies of anti-war demonstrators. These confirm the hysterical nature of reactions to films of napalm victims and A.R.V.N. [*Army of the Republic of Viet Nam*] atrocities, and indicate that for the majority of so-called peace groups the Vietnam war serves the role of masking repressed sexual inadequacies of an extreme nature.[31]

The scandalous hidden ground of war affects and touches everybody. The politically correct surfaces here with the purpose of censoring and neutralizing a fetishistic temptation in a sanctimonious manner. To confront the war imaginary, on the contrary, it is necessary to seize both heads of the monster, the manifest as well as the hidden.

'Pornography is a Powerful Catalyst for Social Change'

Uncanny spirits are at work even behind the most unsuspecting form of *logos* – Ballard also breaches the moral status of science to reveal its morbid attentions. The apparent scientific detachment, the 'analytic activity whose main aim is to isolate objects or events', is compared to the obsessive magnification of detail in pornography: 'This obsession with the specific activity of quantified functions is what science shares with pornography.'[32] The white coat of the scientist hides an abstract pornographer, while the rationalist anxieties of science are double-bound to a dangerous underworld – we might say: the higher the knowledge, the greater the beast.

> Bizarre experiments are now a commonplace of scientific research, moving ever closer to that junction where science and pornography will eventually meet and fuse. Conceivably, the day will come when science is itself the greatest producer of pornography. The weird perversions of human behaviour triggered by psychologists testing the effects of pain, isolation, anger, etc., will play the same role that the bare breasts of Polynesian islanders performed in 1940s wildlife documentary films.[33]

However, it is not simply the morbidity of the detail that renders science and pornography comparable. In fact, the rationalistic anxiety of science is not able to completely neutralize the libidinal impulse driving its quest for knowledge. In Ballard's lucid fiction, the scientific *logos* is always as libidinally charged as pornography. Anatomic descriptions have an uncanny role in his novels, but the same lecherous spectres also surface in other disciplines, from architecture to mechanics, in all those fields of inquiry that cover the extensions of the human exoskeleton. A biomorphic unconscious emerges in the profile of any cognitive or design object. 'Later, the sexual act between them was a dual communion between themselves and the continuum of time and space which they occupied.'[34] This fetishistic relation between libido and objects is not a combinatory effect of new prostheses like in the once-celebrated figure of the cyborg. On the contrary, Ballard's imaginary is organic and pre-digital, anchored to the sinister quotidian sides of a respectable life. His bioengineering operates at the level of the nervous system and libidinal unconscious alone, at the level of *bios* rather than code.

Anticipating the dawn of a new future ethics, Ballard sets libido back at the level of inorganic reality. Far from producing a comical fetishism of 'furniture', this can be described from a Guattarian perspective as the *machinic unconscious*, or in Benjamin's terms as *the sex appeal of the inorganic.* In Ballard, however, such an exercise is not painless or without risk: his 'conceptual' acts are indeed quite carnal and unsettling. The 'abstraction' of sex means a withdrawal of desire from the usual objects of pleasure towards new ones. There is an equivocal exchange of roles, but also of energies between what is considered pornographic and what is considered scientific.

In what way is intercourse per vagina more stimulating than with this ashtray, say, or with the angle between two walls? Sex is now a conceptual act, it's probably only in terms of the perversions that we can make contact with each other at all. Sexual perversions are morally neutral, cut off from any suggestion of psycho-pathology – in fact, most of the ones I've tried are out of date. We need to invent a series of imaginary sexual perversions just to keep our feelings alive.[35]

Ballard saw the profile of a pornographic 'civilization' in the shadow of the 1950s mediascape, far earlier than the *rise of the netporn society*: 'Thanks to press, film and television, sex has become a communal and public activity for the first time since the Edens of a more primitive age. In a sense we now all take part in sex whether we want to or not.'[36] While sex is now rationed daily to media audiences, it already represented the untold power of American political life during the post-war economic boom. Ballard is issuing a plea for free pornography, considering it to be a 'powerful catalyst for social change' and a sign of civil 'renaissance'.

Pornography is under attack at present, thanks in part to the criminal excesses of kiddy porn and snuff movies, and to our newly puritan climate – the fin de siècle decadence that dominated the 1890s, and which we can expect to enliven the 1990s, may well take the form of an aggressive and over-the-top puritanism. A pity, I feel, since the sexual imagination is unlimited in scope and metaphoric power, and can never be successfully repressed. . . . Pornography is a powerful catalyst for social change, and its periods of greatest availability have frequently coincided with times of greatest economic and scientific advance.[37]

However, his idea of *positive* pornography appears quite different from the *radically correct* commercial subcultures of *alt porn* today. What Ballard actually wants to confront is the violent unconscious of pornography, not the well-educated progressive *indie porn* version of sexual education. What would it otherwise mean to request more sex and violence on TV as 'catalysts for change'? Ballard is not a typical postmodern provocateur: 'Needless to say, I believe there should be more sex and

violence on TV, not less. Both are powerful catalysts for change, in areas where change is urgent and overdue.'[38]

Rather, Ballard envisions that more freedom in the mediascape would mean more room for exploring the underground of collective psychopathologies – exactly what is happening thanks to the Internet, but still as an under-investigated and obscure social phenomenon. Unlike contemporary puritans, Ballard was welcoming a new knowledge of the dark spirits populating the imaginary, and not simply in terms of their repression or basic imitation.

Pessimism of Senses, Optimism of Nerves: Deleuze's Francis Bacon

If Ballard's fictional concepts sound too haphazard or chaotic, perhaps Deleuze is a useful reference point back to the more familiar and tranquil waters of aesthetics. Indeed, some similarities with Ballard's biopsy of collective imaginary can also be found in Deleuzian philosophy. His book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* is a classic today, but the carnal critique of the image it provides exceeds the traditional boundaries of the art world and its iconology. Avoiding the overworked concept of *machinic desire*, Deleuze employs another approach in this text to focus on the status of the image. For the sake of context, it is important to underline again how the notion of image has recently been under siege by two fronts: the simulacra of postmodernism, and the poststructuralist notions of production and flow. The philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, was shaped against structuralist thought and the Lacanian cult of the language. In their perspective, the notion of *production* was placed against the hegemony of *representation*. Few pages are spent in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* on the status of the image. Only later, in Deleuze's work on cinema in *The Movement-Image* (1986) and *The Time-Image* (1989) was a broad materialist theory of visual perception advanced. However, it is specifically in *Francis Bacon* that the missing articulation of the image is thoroughly explored, autonomous from the critique of psychoanalytical structures and phantasms.[39]

Through Bacon, Deleuze discovers a way to dismantle the traditional perception and practice of the image, freeing the image from the hegemony of the eye-brain assemblage. Invisible forces surface from the body, wrinkling and deranging the canvas: the *head-meat*, not the *face-spirit*, is the centre of Bacon's paintings. By examining these works, De-

leuze manages to 'dismantle' the image, showing latent animal spirits, similar to the way Ballard demolishes the respectable appearance of the mediascape. In the chapter 'Body, Meat and Spirit: Becoming-Animal', the concept of *becoming-animal* invades the field of the image, making the image itself an 'animal spirit'.

> The body is the figure, not the structure. Conversely, the Figure, being a body, is not the face, and does not even have a face. It does have a head, because the head is an integral part of the body. It can even be reduced to the head. As a portraitist, Bacon is a painter of heads, not faces, and there is a great difference between the two. . . . It is not that the head lacks spirit; but it is a spirit in bodily form, a corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit. It is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog-spirit, a bat-spirit . . . Bacon thus pursues a very peculiar project as a portrait painter: *to dismantle the face*, to rediscover the head or make it emerge from beneath the face. . . . Man becomes animal, but not without the animal becoming spirit at the same time.[40]

In some interviews, Bacon marked a distinction between two kinds of paintings: those addressing the nervous system and those directed to the brain.[41] Bacon's image is deep, it has nerves:

> The Figure is the sensible form related to a sensation; it acts immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh, whereas abstract form is addressed to the head, and acts through the intermediary of the brain, which is closer to the bone.[42]

Rather than anaemic or depressed simulacra, Bacon speaks of the violence of the image. That is, of course, not the violent content of some images, but the cruel effect of any image on the nervous system. Like in Ballard, violence is 'abstracted' from violent content.

> The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domain it traverses: being itself a Figure, it must have nothing of

the nature of a represented object. It is the same with Artaud: cruelty is not what one believes it to be, and depends less and less on what is represented.[43]

Against an ideology of transparency or superficial materialism, Deleuze underlines the presence of invisible energies behind the image. There is always an asymmetrical negotiation between surface and subterranean forces. Bacon's figures are a response to one of the main questions for a painter: 'How can one make invisible forces visible?'[44] In the chapter 'Painting forces', Bacon's image-making is described as the pessimism of brain and senses versus the optimism of nerves – a statement that effectively reworks Deleuze's reading of the Nietzschean notion of tragedy.

> When Bacon distinguishes between two violences, that of spectacle and that of sensation, and declares that the first must be renounced to reach the second, it is a kind of declaration of faith in life. . . . Bacon says that he himself is cerebrally pessimistic; that is, he can scarcely see anything *but* horrors to paint, the horrors of the world. But he is nervously optimistic, because visible figuration is secondary in painting, and will have less and less importance: Bacon will reproach himself for painting too much horror, as if that were enough to leave the figurative behind.[45]

The most interesting passage, however, is where Deleuze recognizes the fight with the dark side of reality: 'The struggle with the shadow is the only real struggle.'

> When, like a wrestler, the visible body confronts the powers of the invisible, it gives them no other visibility than its own. It is within this visibility that the body actively struggles, affirming the possibility of triumphing, which was beyond its reach as long as these powers remained invisible, hidden in a spectacle that sapped our strength and diverted us. It is as if combat had now become possible. The struggle with the shadow is the only real struggle. When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it. Life screams *at* death, but death is no longer this

all-too-visible thing that makes as faint; it is the invisible force that life detects, flushes out, and makes visible through scream. Death is judged from the point of view of life, and not the reverse, as we like to believe.[46]

The last sentence of the book blurs the distinction between the tactile and the optical in the more holistic dimension of the 'haptic diagram'. According to Deleuze, two types of painting can be found in art history: a subordination of the hand to the eye in optical space (Byzantine art) and a subordination of the eye to the hand in a manual space (Gothic art). In haptic space, however, there is no longer any hand-eye subordination in either direction. It implies a type of seeing distinct from the optical, a close-up viewing in which 'the sense of sight behaves just like the sense of touch'. Haptic refers to a more interactive tactile dimension, a term adopted today in the design of interactive computer devices. For Deleuze, the diagram of the image is a haptic space that directly addresses the nervous system, not just the eyes, 'as a branch of neurology'. Deleuze manages to provide a punctual *diagrammatic* description of the canvas as a *dispositif*, but a further investigation is needed to catch the nature and name of the forces behind the imagery.

First Disambiguation: Code Claustrophobia and the Poverty of the Subject

This section attempts to rescue the image from the different impasses of contemporary *radicalism:* as it is represented by the *incredulity of postmodern simulacra* (Baudrillard), by the paranoid critique of the *society of the spectacle* (Debord) and, more generally, by the *claustrophobia of the ideological code* (Žižek) that supposedly shapes any gesture within Western society. Avoiding yet another counter-interpretation of these positions, it is important to emphasize that such a radical thought managed to embody precisely what it was meant to criticize: the capitalist separation of the domain of the image. The relation between critical thinkers and capitalist spectacle, therefore, follows the same seduction of peace activists for war outlined by Ballard. When Žižek, for instance, says that any act of resistance reinforces the dominant code, he puts first himself in a *cul de sac.* While he is effective at deconstructing the language of ideology in its totalitarian and social-democratic forms, all of reality eventually becomes siphoned through the frame of the ideo-

logical *phantasma.* Similar to a post-war trauma, Žižek is still trapped within a scheme developed by the *ideological apparatus* of the old Eastern Bloc. The spiral of weak nihilism cannot be avoided: if each image (as *phantasma*) is ideological, anarchist iconoclasm and puritanism are the only (and all too easy) political consequences. Žižek is indeed another philosopher of separation. There is no escape from the code: 'We never desire, we believe to desire' repeats his paradigm. In books such as *The Plague of Phantasy* (no other title is clearer than this), imagination is never an expression of desire, but what tells us and teaches us how to desire, equivalent to the Kantian *transcendental schematism.* The image decides and desires for you. 'Fantasy does not simply realize a desire in a hallucinatory way: rather its function is similar to that of Kantian "transcendental schematism": a fantasy constitutes our desire . . . it teaches how to desire.'[47]

It is interesting to note how Žižek frames pornography: the meaning of which is not to excite the viewer and to engage in masturbatory practices, but to watch how *others* experience enjoyment instead of me, in my place. More than the power of simulation, this is the *poverty of the subject.* Žižek says clearly that phantasmatic transgression does not break the law, but represents its pure establishment. This scheme is applied to everything from movie critique to religion. If, for example, Foucault finds in ancient Greek culture a model of the 'care of the Self', that is only a phantasmatic fulfilment of his desire, an ideological construct of 'the golden era' or 'the good old days'. Any act of resistance reinforces the code of the dominant regime, while any image is only a phantom fulfilling a phantasmatic need.

As opposed to the caretakers for the postmodern, the purpose of this work is to focus on the field of material forces that constitute the image, to define a new status of the image beginning with its *political* dimension. Following ideally the Aristotelian tradition (from Averroes to Marx, Simondon, Deleuze, Virno and French post-Structuralism and Italian post-Operaismo), where the individual is always shaped by the collective, so here the individual phantasy is shaped by the collective imaginary around it. Delirium, Deleuze and Guattari remind us, is always collective, social, political. A second goal of this analysis, however, is to reconceptualize the perception and use of the individual image from the point of view of the body and vital energies, defeating

any attempt to recognize the image as an independent and autonomous domain – a sort of new *iconocentrism* shaped after Western logocentrism. From this perspective, finally the image circulates freely within the collective body, just like the vital spirits of imagination were said to move through the human body in the medieval age.

Second Disambiguation: Biodigitalism and False Organicism

What happened to the notion of the image in other circles, such as art history and anthropology, during the fashionable years of the postmodernist debate? After so many collateral casualties in the academic world, it is now a good time to examine how the technological infrastructure was responsible for shaping postmodernism and its semiotic model in such a way. Before the appearance of cyberspace, it was the image, and precisely the video image, which was central to a 'declaration of independence'. Ballard's earlier novels, for instance, cover the classic age of television mythology and its typical one-to-many broadcasting model. Then, with the rise of video technology and a more horizontal mode of production, Baudrillard and postmodern cultural theory in general responded to the new scenario, but they did it in a reactive way. As Lazzarato points out, instead of establishing a 'new field of conflict' these theories reduced the video image to a nihilist exercise that obliterated any emancipatory potential.[48] In the same theoretical lineage and weak understanding, the notion of *code* was introduced as the basis of simulacra and already played an important role in the 1970s, years before hacker culture and the network society became the focus of media philosophers. This trajectory from simulacra to digital code and then genetic code has been the dominant axis of media philosophy in the late twentieth century. Today, the digital-genetic code is celebrated as a universal language for any form of life: *biodigitalism*, a biology fixated on code rather than the energy economy of life. To return to our initial inquiry, in the world of art history and art criticism, particularly in the discipline of iconology, we find an alternative lineage of the image from the discourse of postmodernism. But even this lineage ends up aligned with the biodigital paradigm of the last decades – the well-known *hegemony of code*, as postmodernists used to say, is still in operation.

Among art historians, Hans Belting has described the *power of the image* in his book *Likeness and Presence*, which follows the development

of religious iconography in the classic and medieval age before the rise of the modern form of the artwork.[49] During this earlier period, the image had a complete different social role, which cannot be understood through a contemporary conception of visual information, being deeply influenced by modernist notions of the *art object* or *art image.* Belting's concern is, therefore, quite specific: the religious icon in its complete political, social and cultural manifestation. Régis Debray similarly describes this passage from the age of idol to the age of representation in *Vie et mort de l'image.*[50] Interestingly, the cover of the original German editions of *The End of the History of Art?* features the figure of the two-faced god Janus.[51] For Belting, the surface of the image is not a unified whole; Janus symbolizes the double gaze of both the visible image and its invisible counterpoint. In light of this intuition, Belting calls for a more general *iconology* capable of grasping the role of digital media and the new coordinates of the present. His project is to establish a general theory of the image on the new basis of a more extended *Bildanthropologie,* a coming anthropology of the image, precisely to avoid being wrecked on the cliffs of the digital, as other iconologists have done.

In particular, the term iconology has been promoted by W.J.T. Mitchell, who, like Belting and others, can be aligned with a broad current of *neovitalists* of the image, if this term is not considered too controversial.[52] Art historians may in fact have deeper historical insight than media critics. The important lesson from this current of *iconologists* is that throughout classic, medieval and modern history, images have always claimed an organic relation with power. Images are not mere accidents, *phantasmas* or composures of a self-referential *dispositif.* As Belting noted: 'Humankind has never freed itself from the power of images.'[53] Likewise, Mitchell claims 'that magical attitudes toward images are just as powerful in the modern world as they were in so-called ages of faith'.[54] By placing emphasis on this vitalistic aspect, however, the temptation is to follow the postmodern belief in the ontological autonomy of the image itself.

Mitchell's iconology is an interesting case study, for his autonomy of the image takes the form of a *false organicism.* His approach is, therefore, a good example of how contemporary thought falls into a basic *vitalism* without a proper materialistic ground, simply by catching some

fashionable concepts inspired by the *Zeitgeist*. Despite his attempts to free the image from a superficial semiotics, Mitchell employs more metaphors than materialistic concepts. To rescue the image from the incredulity of postmodernism, he presents it as *form of life*, but more in the fashion of an academic convention rather than a true interest in its biological or zoological ground. For instance, the title of one of his books reads *What do pictures want?*[55]

> The philosophical argument of this book is simple in its outlines: images are like living organisms; living organisms are best described as things that have desires (for example, appetites, needs, demands, drives); therefore, the question of what pictures want is inevitable.[56]

Mitchell seems sincerely devoted to a less abstract and more carnal notion of the image. The issue, however, is not simply the metaphorical use of the expression 'forms of life', where such forms are then described as independent beings: images themselves levitate like angels in an isolated sphere of circulation: 'It's not just a question of their producing "imitations of life" (as the saying goes), but that the imitations seem to take on "lives of their own".'[57] Mitchell's definitions of life are also a bit confusing. He claims, for instance, that a proper definition is impossible, that *life* can only be dialectically defined by its negative, *death*. The conclusion is weak: images are like organisms because they are equally capable of dying.[58] On the contrary, as Deleuze noticed in Bacon, 'death is judged from the point of view of life, and not the reverse'.[59] And as Bataille and Serres already observed, along with many other continental thinkers, it is not an ideological misconception to recognize that an organism is defined by entropy and negentropy, by the accumulation and consumption of an excess or energy surplus. However, to apply *will* and *drive* to images risks establishing yet again another *philosophy of flow* in an idealist and abstract space without any breaking points.

> When the question of desire is raised, it is usually located in the producers of consumers of images, with the picture treated as an expression of the artist's desire or as a mechanism for eliciting the desires of the beholder. . . . I'd like to shift the location of desire to images themselves, and ask what pictures want.

Similar to memetics, bioart and generative art, to mention some recent concepts, Mitchell's employment of organic metaphors is simply too abstract. There is no attempt to link the destiny of image technologies to human evolution, like Leroi-Gourhan began to do several decades ago in the 1950s, or to consider the truly parasitic dimension of images, as in the theories of Serres.

> Can we speak of the origin of images, their evolution, mutation, and extinction? How do new images appear in the world? . . . Perhaps, then, there is a way in which we can speak of the value of images as evolutionary or at least coevolutionary entities, quasi life-forms (like viruses) that depend on a host organism (ourselves), and cannot reproduce themselves without human participation.[60]

Applied to new media and distributed networks, Mitchell's organicism begins to resemble a sort of *internal biomorphism*. For instance, computer viruses embody the *bios* 'in very concrete forms' simply on the basis of an assonance. However, the energetic model of computer viruses does not share any resemblance with *offline* living microorganisms. 'My aim, rather, is to observe that within the very heart of the cybernetic the *bios* rears its head in very concrete forms, most conspicuously in the computational virus.'

In Mitchell, we witness an unconscious condensation of many traits of contemporary thought: the well-known death of the author, the artwork as an autonomous being, the specific influence of genetics on Anglo-American culture, the fetishism of the code and so on. Ultimately, however, the human body has no role in the production and consumption of images: 'the artist or image-maker is merely a host carrying around a crowd of parasites that are merrily reproducing themselves, and occasionally manifesting themselves in those notable specimens we call "works of art".'[61] Despite his vague metaphor of the parasite, the separated and 'second nature' of the image is still clearly privileged.

> Thus we talk about images as pseudo-life-forms parasitical on human hosts, we are not merely portraying them as parasites on individual human beings. They form a social collective that has a parallel

existence to the social life of their human hosts, and to the world of objects that they represent. That is why images constitute a 'second nature'.[62]

Mitchell refreshes the Romantic notions of *organicism, vitalism* and *animism* developed against the mechanistic models of the eighteenth century.[63] However, to avoid any nostalgic metaphysics, he recommends that we examine the current 'biocybernetic reproduction' capable of 'produc[ing] physical organisms in the real world out of bits of data and inert substances'.[64] Interestingly, Mitchell ends up aligning his 'forms of life' to programmable biotechnologies, another example of how we are unable to think of life outside the coordinates of *code.*

> The life of images has taken a decisive turn in our time: the oldest myth about the creation of living images, the fabrication of an intelligent organism by artificial, technical means, has now become a theoretical and practical possibility, thanks to new constellations of media at many different levels. The convergence of genetic and computational technologies with new forms of speculative capital has turned cyberspace and biospace (the inner structure of organisms) into frontiers for technical innovation, appropriation, and exploitation – new forms of objecthood and territoriality for a new form of empire.[65]

The 'Civilization of Images' and the Profanation of Pornography

> due e nessun l'imagine perversa parea
> [the perverse image seemed both and neither]
> Dante, *Inferno* XXV 77-78

The ambivalent and conflicted relation of modernity with the image (and more generally, with the collective imaginary and the mediascape) has its genealogy in the neutralization of a materialistic and profane approach to the faculty of imagination originally conducted by medieval Christian culture. In his book *Stanzas*, Giorgio Agamben identifies this distinct separation between phantasy and the 'vital spirit' (or *pneuma*), which occurred nearly nine centuries ago in the Western tradition.[66]

Before this, the pneuma was considered a unique faculty together with imagination: the 'spiritus phantasticus'. In Medieval psychology, in Italian poetry of the twelfth century (*Dolce Stil Novo*) and also, in the conception of *courtly love*, Agamben recognizes a common and positive conception of phantasy that is strictly related to love and the 'animal spirits' of the body.[67] For instance, in his seminal treatise *De Amore*, Andreas Cappellanus introduced love as the 'immoderate contemplation of an internal phantasm'.

> Medieval psychology – with an insight that yielded one of its most fertile legacies for Western culture – conceived of love as an essentially phantasmatic process, involving both imagination and memory in an assiduous, tormented circling around an image painted or reflected in the deepest self. Andreas Cappellanus, whose *De amore* is considered the exemplary theorization of the new conception of love, defined it as the *immoderata cogitatio* (immoderate contemplation) of an internal phantasm.[68]

It was quite usual to encounter medical and anatomical references in the religious and philosophical works of the Middle Ages. In Avicenna and Averroes, for example, it is simply impossible to distinguish between medicine and philosophy.[69] In the same way, love and the imagination were usually described as deeply connected to the good and bad humours circulating in the body. The pneuma as *spiritus phantasticus* was the mediator between the soul and the body, before modern science definitively severed the body-mind relation. A *hydraulic* and *topological* description of the mind only re-emerged with Freud's theory of the unconscious and, more materialistically, with Deleuze and Guattari's *desiring flows*. But under the white coat of science, the animal spirits keep on pulsating, as Ballard reminds us. Today, common perception still dissects the human body in separated layers according to different disciplines (from psychology to neurology, from anatomy to genetics). On the contrary, in a famous passage of *La Vita Nuova*, Dante described the 'metabolism' of love as the simultaneous stimulation of different spirits and their organs.[70] Agamben defines this doctrine as *pneumophantasmology*, linking the vital spirits of the body (*pneuma*) and the images of love (*phantasmas*) together in an organic and harmonious way.

> The synthesis that results is so characteristic that European culture in this period might justly be defined as a pneumophantasmology, within whose compass – which circumscribes at once a cosmology, a physiology, a psychology, and a soteriology – the breath that animates the universe, circulates in the arteries, and fertilizes the sperm is the same one that, in the brain and in the heart, receives and forms the phantasms of the things we see, imagine, dream, and love.[71]

Like modern times, the Middle Ages also had its temptations in the form of fantasies of 'half-naked ladies'. Mental images were generally considered under a negative light, but the conception of courtly love and other profane currents struggled to develop a civilized and healthy discipline of the interior demons, always at risk of being thwarted by religious power.

> To measure the importance of the reevaluation of the phantasy that is accomplished in these writings, it is necessary to recall that in the medieval Christian tradition the phantasy appeared in a decisively negative light. It is not inopportune to remember in this connection that the lascivious half-naked ladies, the half-human and half-feral-creatures, the terrifying devils, and the whole conglomeration of monstrous and seductive images that crystallized in the iconography of the temptations of Saint Anthony represent precisely the phantasms that the Tempter excited in the phantastic spirit of the Saint.[72]

With such a positive conception of desire and phantasy, Agamben defines this avant-garde of the secular culture in the Middle Ages as the proper 'civilization of the image', a *radical thought* contrary to the poverty of 'society of the spectacle' of our times that seems still haunted by ancient religious nightmares and misconceptions about images.

> Not even in the most exalted Romantic theorizing has the imagination been conceived in so elevated and, at the same time, concrete a fashion as in the thought of this period, which surely more than ours deserves the name of 'civilization of the image'. If we keep in mind the close bond that joins love and the phantasm, it is easy to understand the profound influence that this reevaluation of the phantasy

would exercise on the theory of love. Furthermore, because a positive polarity of phantasy had been discovered, it was possible . . . to redis-cover both a positive polarity and a 'spirituality' in the mortal disease of the phantastic spirit that was love.[73]

According to Agamben, it is scholastic theology that obliterates the pneuma as mediator between soul and body, and 'fatally thrust pneu-matology into the half-light of esoteric circles, where it would long sur-vive as the path, rendered impracticable, that our culture might have, but did not in fact follow'.[74] Agamben reveals how the polarizations of our age – that then generated the oppositions of *production* and *repre-sentation, flow* and *code*, for instance – is indeed a simplified abstraction related to the medieval problem of the image. European materialism and a profane ethics attempted to establish a civilized relation with the demons of phantasy, but ultimately they failed. This dramatic conflict has been a political and religious (and indeed biopolitical) issue for cen-turies, and it is still present and unresolved within psychoanalysis and postmodernism (and their popularized versions in the art and activist worlds).

In his recent book *Profanations*, Agamben once again faces the prob-lem of separation under the conditions of the society of the spectacle.[75] Capitalism, like religion, is meant to bring each aspect of life (body, sexu-ality, language) into a separated sphere. The political gesture opposed to this separation is what Agamben calls *profanation*: not simply the gesture that abolishes and erases the separations, but the gesture that knows how to re-deploy and 'play' with their constitution in a positive manner. If, as Agamben says, capitalism managed to sacrifice the image in the separated form of the spectacle, how can this separated sphere of the collective imaginary be made profane? Interestingly, Agamben is inspired by pornography as the ultimate example of capitalist partition. Pornography intervenes precisely to inhibit a possible 'new collective use of sexuality'.

> It is this profanatory potential that the apparatus of pornography seeks to neutralize. What it captures is the human capacity to let erotic behaviors idle, to profane them, by detaching them from their immediate ends. But while these behaviors thus open themselves to

a different possible use, which concerns not so much the pleasure of the partner as a new collective use of sexuality, pornography intervenes at this point to block and divert the profanatory intention.[76]

The pornographic image should be counter-profaned, Agamben suggests, in the same way it profaned sexuality. A reverse profanation is not about censoring pornography but using it in a different way, claiming back the *possibility* that it captured. According to Agamben, 'the profanation of the unprofanable' is the political mission of the coming generation.

> The unprofanable [sic] of pornography – everything that is unprofanable – is founded on the arrest and diversion of an authentically profanatory intention. For this reason, we must always wrest from the apparatuses – from all apparatuses – the possibility of use that they have captured. The profanation of the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation.[77]

The profaning strategies applied to the collective imaginary of war and Internet pornography, strategies that will be presented in the next section, anticipate such a political and aesthetical scenario. Agamben's position is both affirmative and demiurgic, with no place for a reactive intellectual psychologism, or for the gratification of a sort of postmodern temptation. However, awaiting the coming 'civilization of the image', it may also be worth considering the *masochistic* dimension of the consumption of images. Similar to Ballard's vision of a 'just psychopathology' for the exploration of the collective unconscious, a 'just masochism' can be taken as the molecular and bicephalous form of the relation of desire to the collective imaginary. As Deleuze wrote in his 1967 book on masochism, before *desiring machines* monopolized the stage: 'What is true of masochistic writing is equally true of masochistic fantasy: there is no specifically masochistic fantasy, but rather a masochistic art of fantasy.'[78]

Pornography can be taken as a radical case study of the condition of the image in the contemporary climate. The power encased in the pornographic imaginary is not something to be left for the poverty of puritan or liberal debates. As Agamben more recently claimed: 'Contem-

porary is he who receives right in his face the beam of darkness coming from his time.'[79] From the medieval 'diabolical' visual temptations to contemporary *sex tapes* and the unpredictable forms of life shaped by the Internet underworld, an uncanny imaginary circulates as the black-market currency of our libidinal economy – images that regulate the fluids of the collective body in a clandestine manner, and also pervade the energy and the economy of inorganic matter around us. The ex-oskeleton of humankind and its externalized mediated nervous system continue a hollow battle beneath the surface of intellectual debates. This underground libidinal economy is not a reputable place for the 'goodness' of the politically correct: its comprehension belongs to a radical community still to come.

I Like to Watch! Warpunk against Warporn

> For if that's the case, not only pornography but all forms of serious
> art and knowledge – in other words, all forms of truth – are suspect
> and dangerous.
> Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination'

> Do you want to acquire power through the image? Then you will
> perish by the return of the image.
> Jean Baudrillard, *War Porn*

The Grinning Monkeys (of Peace Activism)

How realistic is it to believe that war can be stopped without weap-
ons? Both the anti-war protest movement that filled public squares
globally after 9-11 and the cosmetic democracy of the International
Courts ultimately stood powerless against the raging advance of the US
military. A season of gigantic demonstrations ended with ineffectual
boredom. In the scenario of global war and the rhetoric of the 'clash of
civilizations' after the end of the Cold War and in the middle of the cri-
sis of multiculturalism, the no-war movement offered the same old mes-
sage with an outdated strategy. The only break with the past was the
shear global scale of the mobilization. It is not necessary here to address
the political inconsistency or 'art of complaining' à la Chomsky, typical
of the anti-globalization movement. The focus of this chapter is a deep
analysis of both the war and no-war imaginaries and their 'latent con-
tent'. Not a moralistic or semiotic critique of the propaganda apparatus,
but on the contrary, an investigation of the psychological energies that
mesmerized the pro-war masses and the no-war multitude. As a meth-
odological disclaimer, it is important to underline that this position is
openly anti-war, but politically incorrect and heavily indigestible for
the social-democratic forms of activism (such as NGOs, affinity groups
and social forums, to name only few actors that were quite active in the
early 2000s).

Right from the beginning a political postulate must be introduced
to clear the (theoretical) field of any ambiguity: reason cannot prevail

against the animal instincts of a superpower or an acephalous form of terrorism. A homicidal force can only be arrested by another equal if not stronger force – militant or spontaneous, but certainly not 'democratic'. Everyday we witness this Darwinian spectacle: history repeating itself through a cruel confrontation of forces, while freedom of speech is exercised in an armchair. A second postulate is that pacifists are accomplices of the instinctive forces of the general war spirit, since animal aggressiveness belongs to us all. Indeed, as Ballard observes of war, 'far from repelling us, it appeals to us'.[1] War has a *healthy* effect on the uncontrolled libidinal excess of a nation and this is part of the political equation. Are peace activist aware of the libidinal dimension of war? No, apart from some rare journalistic accounts like *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* by war correspondent Chris Hedges.[2] Are peace activists as excited by war as other people? Here, the *good* intentions of the *good* part of society are not under scrutiny or in question: there is no room for postmodernist provocations. What is specifically at issue here is that a peace movement cannot rely on an alleged immaculate conscience alone. The *bad* intentions of the self-appointed *good* have to be revealed. Any serious agenda has to deal with the hidden content of war and any agenda that refuses to do so is a hypocritical accomplice.

Where is the bestiality for which we condemn armies concealed in us? Let's finally break the self-censorship that belongs both to the radical left and the conformist majority. It should be admitted publicly that seeing the pornographic pictures of torture from Abu Ghraib did not scandalize anybody. On the contrary, for a strange long instant, they excited us, exactly like the obsessive voyeurism that drew us to the videos of the New York 9-11 tragedy. Through such images, we experience the pleasure of repressed instincts, rising again after being narcotized by consumerism and mass media. We show our teeth as monkeys do, when their aggressive grin looks dreadfully like the human smile. If 9-11 has been a shock for Western (bad) conscience, Baudrillard put forward a more shocking thesis: the West itself desired 9-11, as the death drive of a superpower that having reached its natural limits, knows and desires nothing more than self-destruction and war.

> That we have dreamed of this event, that everybody without exception has dreamt of it, because everybody must dream of the destruc-

tion of any power hegemonic to that degree – this is unacceptable for Western moral conscience, but it is still a fact, and one which is justly measured by the pathetic violence of all those discourses which attempt to erase it. It is almost they who did it, but we who wanted it.[3]

There is always the spirit of a primate grinning behind the video screen.

Videoclash of Civilizations

Before pulling the monkey out of the television set, it is important to focus on the battleground on which the media match is played. The more reality is an augmentation of mass, personal and networked devices, the more warfare becomes mediatized, even if the conflict itself takes place in a desert. This is not Baudrillard's banal thesis that 'the Gulf War did not take place',[4] but on the contrary, Ballard's intuition that Third World War 'blitzkriegs will be fought out on the spinal battlefields'.[5] The First Global War started with the live broadcast of the 9-11 air disaster, and continued with sporadic video-guerrilla instalments: every day videos shot by invaders, militiamen and journalists are broadcast from the Iraqi front. Every action in such a media war is designed in advance to fit its spectacular consequences. Terrorists have learnt the rules of this conflict, while the more professional imperial propaganda has no qualms about playing with fakes and hoaxes (the dossiers on weapons of mass destruction, in particular). Bureaucratic propaganda wars are a thing of the past. New media has generated guerrilla combat, opening up a molecular front of grassroots resistance. Video cameras among civilians, weblogs updated by independent journalists, smart-phones used by American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison: each represents an unruly variable that can potentially subvert the propaganda apparatus. Video imagery broadcast by media corporations is now interlaced with the anarchic self-organized structure of digital networks as a new formidable means of distribution (evidenced by the capillary diffusion of the beheading of Nick Berg, probably the first terrorist viral video). Today's propaganda is accustomed to managing a connective imaginary rather than a collective spectacle, and intelligence services set up simulations of the truth based precisely on networked technologies.

Alongside the technoconflict between horizontal and vertical media, two secular cultures of the image face each other on the global me-

diascape. The USA embodies the last stage of *videocracy*, an oligarchic technocracy based on hypertrophic advertising and infotainment, and the colonization of the world imaginary through Hollywood and CNN. Twentieth-century ideologies such as Nazism and Stalinism were intimately linked to a similar fetishism of the *idea-image* (as all Western thought is heir to Platonic idealism). Islamic culture, on the contrary, is traditionally iconoclast: it is forbidden to represent images of God and the Prophet, and generally of any living creature at all. Only Allah is *Al Mussawir*, he who gives rise to forms: imitating his gesture of creation is a sin (even if such a precept never appears in the Koran). Islam, unlike Christianity, has no sacred iconographic centre. In mosques, the Kiblah is an empty niche. Its power comes not from the refusal of the image but from the refusal of its centralizing role, resulting in a material, anti-spectacular, and horizontal cult. Indeed, on Doomsday, painters are meant to suffer more than other sinners. Even if modernization proceeds through television and cinema (that paradoxically have not being condemned as much as painting), the iconoclastic ground remains active, breaking out against Western symbols, as in the case of the World Trade Centre. To strike at Western idolatry, pseudo-Islamic terrorism becomes *videoclasm*, preparing attacks designed for live broadcasting and using satellite channels as a resonant means of propaganda. Al-Jazeera broadcasts images of shot-dead Iraqi civilians, while Western mass media removes these bodies in favour of the military show. An asymmetrical imagery has developed between East and West, and it will be followed by an asymmetrical rage that will erupt with backlashes for generations to come. Here, in this clash between videocracy and videoclasm, a third actor, the global movement, tries to open a breach and develop therein an *autonomous videopoiesis*. However, the creation of an alternative imagery should not be only based on the self-organizing power of independent media, but also on winning back a dimension of myth and the body. Videopoiesis, as a theoretical gesture, should speak – at the same time – to the belly and the brain of monkeys.

Animal Narratives for the Global Mind

Television is the medium that taught the masses a Pavlovian reaction to images. It is also the medium that produced the globalization of the *collective mind* (something more complex than the notion of public

opinion). The feelings of the masses have always been instinctive and 'reptilian': what media proliferation has established is a video mutation of feelings, a becoming-video of the collective brain and collective narration. The global video-brain functions through images, whereas our brains think out of images themselves. 'I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images' – as one of Benjamin's sources laments.[6] Electronic media move too fast for the collective mind to elaborate or process messages consciously or by speech: there is only time for an instant emotional reaction to visual stimuli. The *collective imaginary* arises when a media infrastructure repeats the same images in a million variations, producing a common and shared space – a 'consensual hallucination' around the same object. In the case of television, the serial communication of a million images is far more lethal, because it is instantaneous. On the other hand, the networked imaginary (the imaginary shaped by the Internet and personal media) works in an interactive and asynchronous way, and it may be defined as *connective imaginary*. However, there is something totalitarian in the collective serial broadcasting of the same image across different media. Collective imaginary is the place where media and desire meet, where the same repeated image modifies millions of bodies simultaneously and inscribes pleasure, hope and fear. Communication and desire, the mediasphere and the psychosphere, are the two axes that describe war to the global masses, the way in which the war reaches our bodies far from the battlefront, and the manner in which images are inscribed on the flesh.

The collective imaginary is not only affected by the video evolution of mass technologies, but also by the natural instincts of humankind. As a *political animal* (Aristotle), the human being is inclined to establish narratives that collectively represent the instinct of belonging to its own kind or tribe. *Animal narratives* are another name for mythologies. Television is, in this sense, a *biological medium* – it responds to the need of a unique memory for millions of people, a single animal narrative for an entire nation, similar to other narrative genres, like the epic, ancient myth or holy scriptures. Television represents, above all else, an ancestral feeling of belonging to one Kind; that is, the meta-organism we all belong to. Each geopolitical area has its own video *macro-attractors* (CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and so forth) that function as reference for all

the local media. Beyond the macro-attractors, there are *meta-attractors*, featuring the role of critical consciousness, a function often held by press and web media (*The Guardian* for the English-speaking world, for instance). Of course, the actual workings of the media are much more complex: the list could also include new forms like blogs, which can be defined as collective *micro-attractors*, the smallest on this scale. Suffice it to say that the audience and power of the main attractor is ensured by natural instinct. From the point of view of libidinal economy, media are less *push media* that communicate one-to-many, than *pull media* that attract and condense our desire (many-to-one). Paraphrasing Reich's remark on fascism, rather than the masses being brainwashed by the media establishment, the latter is sustained and desired by the perversion of the desire to belong.

Digital Anarchy: A Videophone versus the Empire

Contemporary media war has incorporated the Internet and the networked imagery has turned in a convergent battleground. For the first time in history, personal media bring the cruelty of war directly into the living room at the speed of an Internet download and beyond any governmental control. This networked imaginary cannot be stopped, and neither can its technological evolution. Absolute transparency is an inevitable fate for all of us, as younger generations have already learnt through YouTube and MySpace. The era of the videophone seriously undermines privacy, along with any kind of confidentiality, including state secrecy. Rumsfeld's outrage at the *US Senate Committee on Armed Services* on the scandal at Abu Ghraib was extremely grotesque: 'We're functioning . . . with peacetime constraints, with legal requirements, in a wartime situation, in the Information Age, where people are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photographs and then passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise, when they had – they had not even arrived in the Pentagon?'. A few days later, Rumsfeld prohibited the use of any camera or videophone by American soldiers in Iraq. Ironically, Rumsfeld himself was the victim of the Internet broadcasting of a famous video that shows him politely shaking hands with Saddam Hussein in 1983. New digital media seem to create an unpredictable digital anarchy, where a videophone can fight against Empire. The images of torture at Abu Ghraib are the in-

ternal nemesis of a civilization of machines that have run out of the
control of their creators and demiurges. There is a machine nemesis
but also an image nemesis: as Baudrillard notes in *War Porn*, the Empire
of the Spectacle is now submitted to the hypertrophy of the Spectacle
itself, to its own greed for images, to an autoerotic pornography. The
infinitely reproducible character of digital technology allowed for the
demise of copyright culture through P2P networks, but also for the
proliferation of digital spam and the white noise of content on the Web.
Videophones have created a networked mega-camera, a super-light pan-
opticon, a horizontal Big Brother. The White House and the Pentagon
find themselves trapped in this web. Digital repetition no longer deliv-
ers the postmodern hall of mirrors, but an interlinked universe where
videopoiesis spontaneously connects the farthest points of the political
spectrum in fatal short circuits.

Warporn: The Sexual Content of the War Imaginary

What came to light with the Abu Ghraib media scandal was not a
casual short-circuit, but an implosion into a deadly vortex of war, tech-
nology, libido and voyeurism. Philosophers, journalists and commenta-
tors from all sides rushed to deliver different perspectives and inaugu-
rate a new framework for analysis. The scenario was quite similar to
Ballard's war visions depicted in *The Atrocity Exhibition*. The novelty of
the images of Abu Ghraib and Nick Berg consisted in the fact that they
forged a new narrative genre for the collective imaginary (whether
fictional or not is beside the point). For the first time, a snuff movie
was projected onto the screen of global imaginary, and those Internet
subcultures accustomed to such images finally came out from the un-
derground. *Rotten.com* suddenly reached the masses. What happened
worldwide on newspapers and weblogs was less the elaboration of a
trauma, than the surprise of a new iconic genre that forced our immu-
nity system and communicative strategies to be upgraded. As Seymour
Hersh noted, Rumsfeld provided the world with a good excuse to ignore
the Geneva Convention, but he lowered the bar for the *tolerance of the
visible* as well, forcing us to accept cohabitation with Horror. English-
speaking journalism defines *warporn* as the fascination with super-sized
weapons and well-polished uniforms in popular tabloids and govern-
ment talk shows, images of infrared-guided bombs and *hi-tech* tanks, a

visual panoply that some define as an aseptic substitute of pornography proper. Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* would be a good example of hardcore warporn, for instance. The cover of *Time*, where the American soldier was chosen as *Person of the Year*, was defined as pure *warporn* by Adbusters: 'Three American Soldiers standing proudly, half-smiles playing on their faces, rifles cradled in their arms.'[7] Warporn is also a subgenre of *trash porn*, still relatively unknown, made on the dark side of the Net. It simulates violent sex scenes between soldiers or the rape of civilians (pseudo-amateur movies usually shot in Eastern Europe and often passed as real). *Warporn* is freed from its status as a Net subculture: its morbid fetish for the war imaginary has now become political weaponry, voyeurism and nightmares of the masses.

The metaphorical association of war with sex underlined first by Anglo-American journalism points to something deeper that was never before made so explicit: a libido that, alienated by wealth, awaits warfare to give free reign to its ancestral instincts. War is as old as the human species: natural aggressiveness is historically embodied in collective and institutional forms, but several layers of technology have separated today's conflicts from its animal substratum. We needed Abu Ghraib pictures to bring to the surface the obscene base of animal energy that lies beneath the usual democratic make-up. Did this historic resurfacing of the repressed occur simply because of the dissemination of digital cameras and videophones? Or is there some deeper connection between the body and technology that is bound to be fatal sooner or later? As mass media are increasingly filled with tragic and morbid news, the frame of digital media seems to be missing or obscuring something. What is left off of the screen? Could it be the energy of that 'passion of the real' which, once exiled from the screen, now explodes off the surface and spirals out of control?

New personal media are directly connected to the psychopathology of everyday life. While we might say that they produce a new *format* or genre of communication, above all, they establish a relation with the body that television never had. Warporn signals the rejection of technology by subconscious forces which express themselves through the very same medium that represses them: this rejection points to the ongoing adaptation of the body to the digital. Proliferation of digital prostheses is not as rational, aseptic and immaterial as it seems. Elec-

tronic media have introduced technological rationality and coolness into human relations – yet the *shadows of the digital* continually resurface. There comes a point where technology physically unbridles its opposite. The Internet is the best example: beneath the surface of an immaterial or disembodied technology lies the traffic of pornographic content that constitutes a large part of its daily bandwidth. At the same time, the Orwellian proliferation of video cameras, far from producing an Apollonian world of transparency, is ridden with violence, blood and sex. We have always considered media as material prosthetics of human rationality, and technology as a new embodiment of the *logos*, but new media also embody the dark side of the Western world. In warporn, we find this Siamese body made up of libido and media, desire and image. Two radical movements that are part of the same development: *personal media* are filled by the desperate libido they originally alienated; war reinvests the estranged libido of consumerism and mass culture. The subconscious cannot lie – the skeletons eventually start knocking on the closet door.

The Reset of the Imaginary

War results from the inability to dream, after depleting all libidinal energy in an outflow of prostheses, commodities and images. Violence forces us to believe again in images of everyday life, images of the body and images of advertising. War represents the *reset of the imaginary*. War brings attention and excitement for advertising back to a zero degree, where it can then start afresh. War saves advertising from the final annihilation of the orgasm, from the nirvana of consumption, from the inflation and indifference of values. War brings the *new economy* back to the *old economy*, to traditional and consolidated goods; it gets rid of immaterial commodities that risk dissolving the market into a big *potlatch* or into the anti-economy of the gift represented by the Internet. War has the positive effect of redelivering us to 'radical' thought, to the political responsibility of representation, against the interpretative flight of 'weak thought', semiotics and postmodernism (where postmodernism is the Western Image looking for an alibi to its own impotence).

Pornographic images of war are the reflux of the animal instinct that our economic and social structures have repressed. But rather than a *psychoanalytic* perspective that reactively justifies new customs and

fashions, such libidinal energy requires a *physical* analysis to be applied. In wartime, images re-emerge with a new autonomous and autopoietic force; and they make clear that images may belong to different genres and different historical periods. Warporn images, for instance, are not everyday representations, they speak directly to the body – they are a cruel, lucid and affirmative force. Like in Artaud's theatre, they are a re-magnetized form of visuality that does not provoke incredulity – 'neuronic icons on the spinal highway', as Ballard would put it. These radical images redeliver the body to us. Radical images are bodies, not simulacra. Their effect is first physical, then cognitive. 'The movement-image and the flux-matter are rigorously one and the same thing,' says Deleuze on cinema.

The accursed tradition of the image is back, with the psychological and contagious power of an Artaudian drama, a machinic image that joins together the material and immaterial, the body and the dream. In a libidinal explosion, warporn liberates the animal energies of Western society. Yet, such energies can be expressed through either fascist reactions or liberating revolts. Radical images are images that are still capable of being *political*, in the strong sense of the word, and they have an impact on the masses that is simultaneously political, aesthetic and carnal. It is quite common, however, to encounter a puritan perspective on such carnal images, especially in those self-conscious circles concerned with 'radical' activism and media ecology.

How can television be used in an intelligent manner? Activist collectives like Adbusters, for instance, would suggest simply turning it off. They annually organize TV strikes, promoting a day or a week's abstinence from television. Recently, Adbusters began a general *Mental Detox Week*,[8] including DVD players, iPods, Xbox, PSP, etcetera . . . But can Western society think without media screens? Even if we were to stop watching TV because of some worldwide catastrophe, our imaginary, hopes and fears would continue thinking in a *televised* frame. This is not a matter of addiction, as video has simply become our primary collective language, where once there was religion, mythology, epic poetry or literature. We could repress the ritual (watching the screen) but we cannot repress the myth ('watching' the image). If we can switch television off, we cannot switch our imaginary off. For this reason, the theory of autonomous videopoiesis is not about producing alternative

information, but about new mythical devices for the collective imagery. In its quest for the Radical Image – that is, the image capable of stopping war and subverting Empire – the global movement has pursued video activism (from Indymedia to street TVs) and mythopoiesis (from Luther Blissett to San Precario). However, the anti-globalization movement never tried to merge those strategies to challenge the psychopathology of Bin Laden, Bush, Hollywood and CNN at the level of myth. Videopoiesis does not mean the proliferation of cameras in the hands of activists, but the creation of *radically incorrect* video narratives, new genres and formats rather than alternative information. While the Western imaginary is being filled with the dismembered bodies of heroes, the global movement has always been quite uneasy about its bodily desires, buried under a puritan and Third-Worldist rhetoric. Warporn is a challenge for the movement, not to equal the horror, but to produce images that awaken and target the body.

Throughout its history, television has always produced macro-bodies, mythical giants magnified by media power, bodies as cumbersome as ancient gods. The televisual regime creates monsters, hypertrophic bodies like the image of the President of the USA, the Al-Qaeda terrorist brand or the humanly synthetic movie stars depicted by Ballard on the American skyline of the '60s. Alternatively, the Internet and personal media are more inclined to an iconoclast register and constantly attempt to dismember those figures to produce new bodies out of their isolated parts. A liberated notion of videopoiesis should address first the *unconscious self-censorship* found in many liberal or radical sections of society – self-censorship that, behind the crypto-puritan imagery, is the grin of the monkey. Only once self-censorship is eliminated can videopoiesis start its creative reassembly of the dismembered *neural* bodies of the mediascape.

Warpunk: 'I Like to Watch!'

Watching images of cruelty is good for the population. In what sounds like a future version of Foucault's biopolitics, Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* portrays war news and scenes of violence as improving adults' sexual activity and the condition of psychotic children. Warlords are also doing that today, filling the collective imaginary with brutality, but they are nevertheless left to do it in peace. There is no reaction from radical

artists and activists, blocked in timid defence of media ecology. In the world of institutional politics, activists are always victims of the blackmail of non-violence and terrorism, but at least in the realm of imaginary, they could feed any kind of animal spirits and turn *warporn* into *warpunk. Warpunk* is not a delirious subculture that embraces weapons in an aesthetic gesture. On the contrary, it uses radical images as weapons of legitimate defence. To paraphrase a Japanese saying, warpunk steals from war the art of embellishing death. Warpunk uses warporn in a tragic way to overcome Western culture and the self-censorship of the counterculture itself.

What is the point of confronting the *hubris* of the American warlords with the imagery of the victim, holding hands painted in white to the sky in the characteristic gesture of the no-war mobilizations? Victimhood is a bad adviser: it is the definitive validation for Nazism, the sheep's call that makes the wolf even more indifferent. The global movement is, in this sense, a good example of 'weak thought' and a reactive culture. Perhaps because, unlike warlords and terrorists, it never developed a way to elaborate the tragedy of war, violence and death. Following Agamben's suggestion, how can we counter-profanate the profanation of our fantasies?

In the video *I Like to Watch* by controversial transgender artist Chris Korda, porn scenes of oral sex and masturbation are mixed with football and baseball matches and with the well-known 9-11 images.[9] The phallic imagery reaches its climax: the Pentagon is hit by an ejaculation, multiple erections are turned into the New York skyline, the Twin Towers themselves become the object of an architectural fellatio. This video condenses and re-projects the lowest instincts of American society: a subterranean common ground that binds together spectacle, war, pornography and sport, an orgy of images that exposes to the world its real animal background. Warpunk is this squadron of B52s throwing libidinal bombs and radical images into the heart of the global imaginary.

Libidinal Parasites: Netporn and the Machinic Excess

> A widespread taste for pornography means that nature is alerting us to some threat of extinction.
> J.G. Ballard, 'New from the Sun'[1]

> Perhaps violence, like pornography, is some kind of an evolutionary standby system, a last-resort device for throwing a wild joker into the game?
> James G. Ballard, *Myths of the Near Future*[2]

Porn on Diazepam and the Technopathology of Immaterial Labour

Many Western intellectuals reassure us that pornography is nothing but the ultimate embodiment of the society of spectacle and late capitalist commodification (Baudrillard, Žižek, and also Agamben, to name only few).[3] They say that it is not politically liberating, nor particularly dangerous. In the world of radical theory and critical philosophy, there is clearly an attempt to sanitize pornography, while simultaneously, there has been a notable rise in politically-correct pornography and the emergence of a new spectrum of subcultural flavours (the so-called *indie porn* or *alt porn*) have the effect of neutralizing its obscenity potential.[4] While a possible comparison can be drawn to the inflationary processes in the mediasphere described by Geert Lovink as a *nihilistic impulse*,[5] however one acknowledges it: contemporary porn is less 'pornographic'. Interestingly, there is no genealogic attempt to understand why we talk so much about pornography today or why we observe a pervasive *pornification* of the collective imaginary (what has been ironically dubbed as the 'rise of the netporn society').[6]

Discourses on porn can be categorized respectively around moral complaints, fervent subcultures and minimizing cultural theory. The last ones, in particular, still smell of postmodernist Diazepam (also known as Valium), if we can define postmodernism as a sort of intellectual response to Western anxiety. Ballard, however, grasps the contemporary psychosphere better than any PoMo philosopher and provides a less comfortable scenario, when he states: 'A widespread taste for por-

nography means that nature is alerting us to some threat of extinction.'[7] Ballard's warning recalls the libidinal breakdown he depicts in his novels – the breakdown of an Empire at its dusk. But what is the reason behind such a bankruptcy of desire? In the last half century, pornography has become ubiquitous, a mass commodity (and a public utility, why not?) that is almost free in the age of the Internet. Pornography itself can be considered the ultimate by-product of an exhausted technological Empire: an 'affective commodity' for an everyday life that absorbs vast amounts of social energy. The gnostic utopia of media culture typically obscures the dark side of digital networks and does not track the circulation of such by-products. Fortunately, the Net has managed to both map and expose all the shadows of the collective unconscious point-to-point. 'Technopathology' may be the name of this under-investigated field of research: a crucial but still emerging discipline carried on by a few pioneers, like Mark Dery, for instance, a modern Virgilio of the Internet *Inferno* (with books such as *Escape Velocity* and *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium*).[8]

Moreover, Ballard reminds us how our ancestral reproductive instincts have not been suffocated by the progressive stratification of technology: it finds anyway a path through the channels of a pervasive mediascape to devour pornography. Ballard keeps his antenna tuned to the frequencies of the collective unconscious, but is elusive about the genealogy of such a global temperament. Less ancestral but no less dystopian, another *technopathologist*, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, clearly connects the proliferation of pornography to the digital revolution which has absorbed our bodies in a completely virtualized mode of communication at the expense of natural sensuality. 'In the saturated infosphere the immediate way of perception of the body is pornography,'[9] Berardi claims:

> The electronic excitation conveyed through the entire Mediascape puts the sensitive organism in a state of permanent electrocution. Time for linguistic elaboration of a single input is reduced as the number of inputs increase, and the speed of the input gets higher. Sex is not speaking anymore. It is rather babbling, and faltering, and it is also suffering of for it. Too few words, too little time to talk. Too little time to feel. Porn is an essay in emotional automation and uniformity of emotional time of response. Don't miss the implication

between permanent electrocution, shortening of linguistic attentive elaboration, atrophy of emotional response. Pornography is just the VISIBLE surface of this neuro short-circuit. The connective generation is showing signs of an epidemic of emotional atrophy. The disconnection between language and sexuality is striking. Pornography is the ultimate form of this disconnection.[10]

Berardi seems sceptical about the adaptability of humankind to a new technological environment. Ballard, on the contrary, suggests that pornography (or any such violent phenomenon) might be considered a 'wild joker' thrown into the genetic game to trigger a different destiny. However, we should not exclude the possibility that a new generation of human beings will eventually develop the cognitive and physical skills needed to adapt their sex lives to this over-stimulating mediascape. For now, it is clear that Internet pornography is the dark side (or grey side) of a heavily computer-based mode of economic production, a side effect of the cognitive energies co-opted by the post-Fordist revolution of digital machines. Considering the statistical evidence on hand, immaterial labour and network society should no longer be mentioned without a reference to netporn as well.[11]

The Thermodynamics of Pornography

Usually pornography is defended on the basis of a paradigm of free expression and free speech – they used to say we don't need theory to deal with our bodies. On the contrary, the pornography debate unconsciously applies different models of pleasure and desire. Even when we are defending free expression with the typical liberal detachment, we are using a specific model of pleasure each time. Generally speaking, two distinct schools can be introduced: those who believe that libido is a *limited energy* and those who believe that libido is an *endless flux*. Deleuze (following Nietzsche against Freud) introduced desire as an affirmative repetition in his book on masochism, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*.[12] Freud, on the other hand, considered obsessive repetition as a manifestation of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (and obsession consistently returns even in the discourse around netporn).[13] In the works with Félix Guattari, however, Deleuze's notion of desire embraced an ever-expanding *machinic* Spinozism (starting with the book

Anti-Oedipus). Here, Berardi specifically criticizes Deleuze and Guattari because they did not foresee depression as a natural consequence of their *schizo* enthusiasm[14] – even if somehow they covered depression in the chapter 'How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?', where different typologies of body are introduced (hypochondriac body, paranoid body, schizo-body, drugged body, masochist body, etcetera).[15] The basic assumption behind Berardi's position is that libidinal energy is limited and we simply cannot party all the time.

There is no reason why a 'flux' should be strictly framed as a physical or biological flow of matter (and therefore 'measured' as limited). However, it could be interesting to redesign a thermodynamics of desire after Deleuze and Guattari and their hydraulics of feelings, machines and flows. If the First Law of Thermodynamics is applied to the human libido, it could be translated as: 'In any process, the total desire remains constant.' And the Second Law (more interestingly) should read: 'The entropy of desire constantly increases' – in other words, it means that our energy eventually goes senile. Pornography is unconsciously framed by its detractors as an assault on the whole energy capital of an individual or society. There is a sort of thermodynamic parsimony applied by right-wing censors or left-wing sceptics to the consumerism of pornography. But even porn producers and heavy downloaders know that porn cannot be consumed under unlimited conditions. Curiously, the 'meaning' of porn imagery is directly connected to our degree of physical excitement: have you ever tried to watch a porn movie at breakfast time? For most, the libidinal 'significance' vanishes. Porn images are quite peculiar, they speak to our animal scopophilia – a sort of ancestral cinema for our reptilian nervous system. It is impossible to judge a pornographic image according to a moral register simply because each one has a completely different quality (and quantity) of libidinal desire. Both pansexuality and asexuality should be tolerated, along with high and low degrees of libidinal excitement.

Pornographic images are both consumed and produced by our flows of desire. How can this libidinal economy be dealt with? Before an aesthetics of porn, there should be a materialist ethics of energies and forces. This scenario is never simply binary. For example, between the school of *endless flux* on the one side, and the school of *limited libido* on the other, we can situate Bataille and his human drive for excess. In Ba-

taille, sexual instincts constantly challenge and destroy human identity; they are tied to a double-bind with beauty and animality, unable to escape contradictions and impossible to be reduced to a quasi-thermodynamic paradigm.[16] There is never equilibrium according to the second law of the thermodynamics of desire. Even when we defend pornography we deal with a desire that it is never definable and predictable. As Deleuze and Guattari observe: 'Technical machines only work if they are not out of order. Desiring machines on the contrary continually break down as they run, and in fact run only when they are not functioning properly.'[17] There is always a *surplus* of libido drifting around. Picturing the materialistic forces behind desire would be an interesting experiment for an 'ethics of porn'. However, as Andrew Ross brilliantly put it, it is difficult to civilize desire:

> Finally, we must take into account the possibility that a large part of pornography's popularity lies in its refusal to be educated; it therefore has a large stake in celebrating delinquency and wayward or unauthorized behavior, and in this respect is akin to cultural forms like heavy metal music, whose definitive, utopian theme, after all, is 'school's out forever'. To refuse to be educated: to refuse to be taught lessons about maturity and adult responsibility, let alone about sexism and racism; to be naughty, even bad, but mostly naughty; to be on your worst behavior – all of this may be a ruse of patriarchy, a ruse of capitalism, but it also has something to do with a resistance to education, institutional or otherwise. It has something to do with a resistance to those whose patronizing power and missionary ardor are the privileges bestowed upon and instilled in them by a legitimate education. Surely there is a warning here for intellectuals who are committed today, as always, to 'improving' the sentimental education of the populace.[18]

The Entropy of Desire and the Negentropy of Machines

Digital machines have always been framed as symmetrical devices, where energy goes in and gets out, where input energetically equals output, according to a widespread belief in the smooth, free and effortless reproducibility of binary data. Media culture (and most successfully digital music[19]) tried to focus on the status of errors and glitches, but only

within the combinatory structure of the digital code (a claustrophobic perspective with no attention to the biological and analogue context that machines have to inhabit). At the beginning of 'machine criticism' and dystopian literature, decades before the proliferation of Turing machines, Samuel Butler claimed a *continuum* between the organic and machinic world in his novel *Erewhon.*[20] As McLuhan comments:

> As early as 1872, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* explored the curious ways in which machines were coming to resemble organisms not only in the way they obtained power by digestion of fuel but in their capacity to evolve ever new types of themselves with the help of the machine tenders. The organic character of the machines, he saw, was more than matched by the speed with which people who minded them were taking on the rigidity and thoughtless behaviourism of the machine.[21]

An entropic model of netporn is useful for demonstrating how the dominant techno-paradigm is partial in its fetishism of digital code and abstract spaces: there is always a dissipation of energy, a 'nihilist impulse' that also affects machines. However, the opposite process is actually more interesting: living energy constantly accumulates against natural entropy, what Erwin Schrödinger in his book *What is Life?* calls *negentropy*, a dynamic that makes a biological model more intriguing than a thermodynamic one.[22] Machines, like organic cells, consume and dissipate energy, but at the same time they are able to accumulate, condense and store energy. Both material and immaterial objects produced by machines can be considered concretions of energy. Machines are usually defined as devices that transmit or *transform* energy, and more importantly, that *store* energy. However, I am not suggesting that machines belong to a separate autonomous realm as in a predictable science-fiction narrative. Media *and* humans have always been interconnected in a collective system of communication that functions as a big condenser of information and attractor of attention. Networks can be seen as a massive device for accumulation, redistribution and storage of energy. Networks expand every day; when they reach a critical mass or threshold, they trigger a new process, like a new biological species. The Internet itself has grown from BBS to Second Life, and its form of

organization has passed through different stages of accumulation, condensation, hegemony and crisis.

Following the desiring capitalism of *Anti-Oedipus*, Hardt and Negri depict the affective dimension of contemporary production in *Empire* and other works on 'affective labour'.[23] What they call 'biopolitical production' translates into Deleuze and Guattari's 'desiring production', but with the difference that Hardt and Negri emphasize the conflict of living labour in order to give a tensive arrow to an 'immanent plane of desire' that otherwise would appear too indeterminate: 'Deleuze and Guattari discover the productivity of social reproduction (creative production, production of values, social relations, affects, becomings), but manage to articulate it only superficially and ephemerally, as a chaotic, indeterminate horizon marked by the ungraspable event.'[24]

Hardt and Negri's ontology is not specific regarding the full spectrum of affective production and does not cover many perverted, contradicting and obscure feelings in the contemporary psychosphere (including the so-called 'dark side of the multitude' and its amphibious nature).[25] In any case, even with respect to Deleuze and Guattari's intuitions, these dirty engines should be inspected more carefully to grasp the extraction of a *libidinal surplus-value*. What defines a machine (or a network) is always a relation to a surplus. Media, like biological organisms, function in an unclean and viscous way – eating and defecating – but there is always an unforeseen tension towards the accumulation of new energy. Actually, Deleuze and Guattari originally introduced three kinds of desiring machines and not simply one: desiring machines that produce, cut or consume. It seems that only a generic type met public success. Their mechanosphere indeed frames capitalism in quite a complex scenario, crossed by a chaotic interlacement of flows, on the basis of a continuous energy streaming from above. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is an infinite flux.

> . . . every machine is a machine of a machine. The machine produces an interruption of the flow only insofar as it is connected to another machine that supposedly produces this flow. And doubtless this second machine in turn is really an interruption or break, too. But is such only in relationship to a third machine that ideally – that is to say, relatively – produces a continuous, infinite flux: for example,

the anus-machine and the intestine-machine, the intestine-machine and the stomach-machine, the stomach-machine and the mouth machine, the mouth machine and the flow of milk of a herd of dairy cattle ('and then, and then, and then . . .'). In a word, every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it. This is the law of the production of production.[26]

Here, Deleuze and Guattari focus more directly on the assemblage of machines and production than the accumulation of energy. The libidinal 'accumulation' (in the form of collective investment) takes place around paranoid poles (the Father, the Family, the State, and so forth).

Which function do media accomplish in a scenario of widespread libidinal accumulation? Traditionally, media have been described as information channels, body prostheses and mimetic devices. I try to frame them as libidinal organisms, more specifically, as symbionts, or even better *libidinal parasites*, under the concept of the extraction and accumulation of libidinal surplus-value. Surplus-value is another way of describing the excess of energy and its exploitation or enjoyment. Libidinal surplus-value specifically refers to the tension that drives the media economy and its evolution. For instance, Internet porn videos can be framed as symbiotic organisms that are a structural part of digital networks. The simulacra of pop stars may be considered affective parasites too. Indeed, 'spectacular' machines work as parasites because they channel and accumulate our libido in a highly physical way. Media parasites absorb our libidinal energies as a surplus and condense it in the form of attention and fetishism towards brands, technology, material and immaterial commodities. By the word *parasite*, no moral judgement is implied: perhaps libidinal parasites are just a new generation of organisms (together with 'emotional media' and 'affective commodities') that we are just starting to become familiar with.

In *The Parasite*, Michel Serres described human relations as a never-ending parasitic chain: 'The parasite parasites the parasite.'[27] Each organism is a parasite of another. Human beings are parasites of nature. The global communication system itself is a parasitic system. What is missing in this picture of the parasite, however, is the accumulation

and extraction of a surplus typical of any form of life (and organization). Here, I suggest introducing the concept of parasite as an engine of accumulation rather than an element of 'pure mediality'.[28]

Vortices Accumulating Crystals of Time

What has to be clarified by the critical discourse around communication machines (media culture and media activism) is that they are never a neutral tool for free speech, free culture and free cooperation. A serene and peaceful scenario is never given: they incessantly accumulate energy below the surface. The accumulation of surplus-value in any form (libido, attention, information, data, even electricity) and its breaking point should be the political focus of a critical media culture, as much as any discourse about *free cooperation* and *free culture*.[29] Of course, all the forms of *collective intelligence* and *creative commons* driven by technology may represent a real hazard against the capitalistic accumulation of surplus-value, but beyond or beneath the immaterial layer there is always a material by-parasite that is never seriously confronted. The interesting part of the movie *The Matrix* (to indulge in a plot that everybody knows) is less the virtual reality game than the parasitic role of the digital world above the human bodies: in the year 2199, intelligent machines have taken control on human beings and exploit them as an energy source, growing countless people in pods and harvesting their bioelectrical energy and body heat. Accumulation still runs despite, or possibly thanks to, digital *commonism*.

To adapt the standard Foucauldian paradigm, these molecular and pervasive parasites embody a biopolitical function previously performed only by old media and institutions on a broader scale. In his book *Videofilosofia*, Maurizio Lazzarato is even more specific when he describes how electronic technologies freeze 'crystals of time' out of the living time of their users – those 'crystals' are moving images that become part of the immaterial assembly line of post-Fordism.

> The central hypothesis around which our work is organized is that *electronic and digital machines, as well as intellectual labour, 'crystallise time'.* . . . Image is never something that works upon lack, absence, negativity. Image is not something added to the real to represent it, but it is the texture itself of the being.[30]

Here, Lazzarato frames video-electronic media as autonomous engines able to produce and accumulate time in the same way as memory and imagination. The accumulation of 'crystals of time' through moving images is a key insight that Lazzarato explores at the same time *Lavoro immateriale* was published *(*whereas only an abstract understanding of the concept of immaterial labour has been well received). Following Bergson and Deleuze, Lazzarato develops a sophisticated notion of the *moving image* that is no longer the flat simulation of postmodernism, but a device screwed into flesh and reality. I take the concept of video technologies as engines of time accumulation to introduce them as parasites of libidinal accumulation: where Lazzarato situates duration and time we introduce desire and libidinal energy.

> Electronic and digital technologies (but even the cinema) are 'mechanics' that *autonomously produce image.* Retaking one of Simondon's intuitions, instead of defining them as simply external extensions of the senses of the human being (as a lens in respect to an eye), they should be understood as 'engines' capable of a 'relative autonomy' in respect to the man. Different from mechanical and thermodynamic engines 'that take a [kinetic and potential] energy from the outside', they are indeed engines that accumulate duration and time. And if memory and imagination can be defined as 'organic engines' *that accumulate and produce time*, video technology and computers may be defines as non-organic engines that work upon the same principle.[31]

Out of any virtual-reality dream, back to the analogue world, each media assemblage becomes a large or small vortex of accumulation, each device an energy parasite. Time and desire are attracted and crystallized, and then transformed and condensed into other forms. It has to be clearly pointed out that parasites are never 'immaterial' – they always transform our fluxes into something tangible. Netporn converts libidinal flows into money and daily siphons a huge bandwidth on a global scale. Netporn transforms libido into pure electricity: exactly as file-sharing networks are reincarnated as an army of MP3 players, Free Software helps to sell more IBM hardware and Second Life avatars consume as much electricity as the average Brazilian.[32] Libidinal surplus is extracted and channelled across the technological infrastructure and in-

vested back into the infrastructure itself, into the imagery or into other devices connected to and dependant upon that network. Accumulation of libidinal surplus is easily turned into money, attention, visibility, spectacle, material and immaterial commodities.

Libidinal Parasites and the Accumulation of Libidinal Surplus

This overview attempts to encapsulate some concepts around the notions of energy surplus and desire, investigating entropy and negentropy within the media biosphere. Moving from Marx's accumulation of surplus-value to Bataille's excess, and from Deleuze and Guattari's desiring production to Schrödinger's negentropy, I have tried to condense a nodal point in the theoretical figure of the libidinal parasite. To escape the impasses of the current media theory, I have suggested a definition of machine (or network) as something always in relation to an external surplus and not as a virtual system held apart or abstracted from material concerns. Following Michel Serres, the entire mediascape can be described as a parasitic chain. The field is vast and a more detailed cartography is needed to properly investigate different intuitions, such as Ballard's visions about the ancestral instincts of media, Berardi's 'pathologies of hyper-expressivity' and Lovink's 'nihilist impulse' – all of them affecting the contemporary mediascape. Personally, I focused on Internet pornography as a radical case of the extraction of libidinal surplus-value in the society of the spectacle.

Pornography could be considered the ultimate commodity because the instinct of the Species has become the basis for the extraction of surplus-value by the megamachine – there is something truly apocalyptic in this. And there is also something totalitarian in the way the netporn infrastructure is supported mainly by the 'flows' of male libido. Despite the rise of *alt porn* and the activism of queer communities, pornography remains mainly the business of a male audience and a female (usually exploited) workforce. Generally, either in the context of softcore advertisements or hardcore pornography, this sexual desire reinforces the new electronic superstructure of humankind. Ultimately, porn might be concerned with the preservation and reproduction of humanity as much as any fundamentalist church, even in the form of a wild joker.

Notes

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1 This popular saying is probably of Jewish origin, see the *Talmud*, Tractate Sukkah 52a: 'The greater the person, the greater his Yetzer Hara (evil inclination)'.

Introduction

1   John M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936).

2 Paolo Virno, 'So-called "evil" and criticism of the state', in: *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2008); original version: 'Il cosiddetto «male» e la critica dello Stato', *Forme di vita*, no. 4 (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2005).

3 See also: Geert Lovink, 'The Principles of Notworking', inaugural speech, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2005. Web: www.hva.nl/lectoraten/documenten/ol09-050224-lovink.pdf.

4 The economist Joseph Schumpeter popularized and used the term 'creative destruction' to describe the process of transformation that accompanies radical innovation. In Schumpeter's vision of capitalism, innovative entry by entrepreneurs was the force that sustained long-term economic growth, even as it destroyed the value of established companies that enjoyed some degree of monopoly power: Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

5 As Félix Guattari also noticed in the case of stock markets: 'economic semiotisation becomes dependent on collective psychological factors', in: Félix Guattari, *Chaosmose* (Paris: Galilée, 1992); translation: *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). For a brilliant analysis of the *linguistic spirits* of stock markets see also: Christian Marazzi, *Capitale e linguaggio. Dalla New Economy all'economia di guerra* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2002); translation: *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy* (New York: Semiotexte, 2008). On the relation between stock markets and information flows see: Ned Rossiter, 'The Art of Day Trading' in: *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions* (Rotterdam/Amsterdam: NAi Publishers/Institute of Network Cultures, 2006).

6   In a more general sense, Giorgio Agamben conceived this *anthropological machine* of separation at the core of spectacular capitalism and also behind the biopolitical secession of the human from the animal: Giorgio Agamben, *L'aperto. L'uomo e l'animale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002); translation: *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

7 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanazioni* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2005); translation: *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

8 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

9 Tiziana Terranova, 'Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy', in: *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004). Web: www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/voluntary.

10 The notion of an *artistic mode of production* was introduced in: Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

11 Antonio Negri, *Il dominio e il sabotaggio. Sul metodo marxista della trasformazione sociale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977); translation: *Dominion and Sabotage: On the Marxist Method of Social Transformation*, in: Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy* (London/New York: Verso, 2005).

Chapter 1
Animal Spirits: A Conteptual Bestiary

The Diseases of the Empire

1   James G. Ballard, *Millennium People* (London: Flamingo, 2003).

2   *The Economist*, 22 March 2008: 'In his book *Wealth, War and Wisdom*, Barton Biggs, a Wall Street veteran, suggests that investors should own, as insurance against the apocalypse, 'a farm or a ranch somewhere far off the beaten track but which you can get to quickly and easily'. . . . But even on the assumption that war and civil disorder are avoided, Mr Biggs' advice still has some merit. After all, farmland, after many years in the doldrums, is suddenly fashionable again, thanks to revitalized agricultural prices. Those prices may be due for a retreat in the short term, but competition from biofuels and increased demand from Asia may nevertheless mean that the era of cheap food is over. British farmland prices rose by 25% last year, according to Knight Frank, an estate agent. It would be a nice irony if the best hedge against a collapse of the post-industrial economy turned out to be a return to the agrarian past'.

Barton Biggs, *Wealth, War and Wisdom* (New York: Wiley, 2008), 332: 'Another, much smaller part of your diversification strategy should be to have a farm or a ranch somewhere far off the beaten track but which you can get to quickly and easily. Think of it as an insurance policy, and for rich people in the developed economies a farm is a fine diversifier and probably an excellent long-term investment. Perhaps its purchase price should amount to five percent of your net worth. The control of food-producing land is a basic instinct of mankind, landowners seem to find considerable psychic satisfaction just from the knowledge of possession. There are few things as fulfilling as having a drink in the sunset and looking at your fields and cows. . . . You should assume the possibility of a breakdown of the civilized infrastructure. Your safe haven must be self-sufficient and capable of growing some kind of food. It should be well-stocked with seed, fertilizer, canned food, wine, medicine, clothes, etc. . . . Even in America and Europe there could be moments of riot and rebellion when law and order temporarily completely break down. A few rounds over the approaching brigands' heads would probably be a compelling persuader that there are easier farms to pillage. Brigands tend to be cowards. I repeat that history suggests that the rich almost always are too complacent, because they cherish the illusion that when things start to go bad, they will have time to extricate themselves and their wealth. It never works that way. Events move much faster than anyone expects, and the barbarians are on top of you before you can escape.'

3   John M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 161-162: 'Even apart from the instability due to speculation, there is the instability due to the characteristic of human nature that a large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than mathematical expectations, whether moral or hedonistic or economic. Most, probably, of our decisions to do something positive, the full consequences of which will be drawn out over many days to come, can only be taken as the result of animal spirits – a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities.'

4   BAVO (ed.), *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007).

5   Ibid., 23.

6   'Santiago Sierra is known for his provocative performances, which have included paying refugees from Chechnya to remain inside cardboard boxes, giving money to young Cubans for the privilege of tattooing their backs, dying the hair of Africans blonde to make them look European, and spraying 10 Iraqi immigrant workers with insulating foam.' Source: 'We Make Money Not Art', www.we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2006/03/holocaust-insta.php, accessed August 2008.

7   BAVO, *Cultural Activism*, op. cit. (note 5), 6.

8   Dieter Lesage, 'Cultural Resignation Today: On Over-Identification and Overstatement', in BAVO, *Cultural Activism*, op. cit. (note 5), 89.

9   See: Inke Arns, *Avantgarde in the Rearview Mirror: On the Paradigm Shifts of Reception of the Avantgarde in (ex) Yugoslavia and Russia from the 80s to the Present* (Ljubljana: Maska, 2006).

10   Slavoj Žižek, 'Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?', *M'ARS*, vol. 3-4 (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1993).

11   See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Yes_Men.

12   See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Yes_Men#Dow_Chemical.

13   Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles/New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 50-51.

14   Ibid.

15   Ibid., 110, thesis 10.

16   Dieter Lesage, 'Global Cities and Anti-Globalist Resistance', in BAVO (ed.), *Urban Politics Now: Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2007).

17   The Global Carnival Against Capital took place on Friday, June 18, 1999. It was an international day of protest timed to coincide with the 25th G8 Summit in Köln, Germany. The carnival was inspired by the 1980s Stop the City protests and the Global Street Party, which happened at the same time as the 24th G8 Summit in Birmingham, United Kingdom in 1998. The rallying slogan was *Our Resistance is as Transnational as Capital*. . . . In London, there was a large march planned for midday and autonomous actions in the morning. Among other actions, a Critical Mass bicycle ride brought the City of London traffic to a standstill in rush hour. The Campaign Against Arms Trade closed down a Lloyds bank with a 'die-in'. . . . Between two and three o'clock, the marches came together and an estimated 5,000 people converged on the London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE). A fire hydrant was set off . . . and the lower entrance to the LIFFE was bricked up. Banners were hung, reading *Global Ecology Not Global Economy*, and *The Earth Is A Common Treasury For All*, the latter a quote from Gerrard Winstanley of the seventeenth-century Diggers movement. Graffiti messages were sprayed and CCTV cameras were disabled. . . . In the early afternoon a small group of protesters broke into the Cannon Bridge building, smashed up the reception area and tried to access the LIFFE trading floor, but were repelled by LIFFE traders in hand-to-hand fighting on the escalators.' Wikipedia entry 'Carnival Against Capitalism', accessed on August 2008, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival_Against_Capitalism:

18   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Paris: Minuit, 1972).

The Dark Side of the Multitude

1   Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 80.

2   Paolo Virno, 'So-called "evil" and criticism of the state', in: *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation* (Los Angelese: Semiotext(e), 2008). Original version: Paolo Virno, 'Il cosiddetto «male» e la critica dello Stato', *Forme di vita*, no. 4 (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2005), 9-35.

3   Carl Schmitt, 'Der Begriff des Politischen', 1927, in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik*, 1927. Trans.: *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 61.

4   Virno, 'So-called "evil" and criticism of the state', op. cit. (note 2), 13.

5   Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 70-71, first published in German in 1930 as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*.

6   Virno, 'So-called "evil" and criticism of the state', op. cit. (note 2), 16 [translation changed].

7   Ibid., 18.

8   Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

9   Virno, 'So-called "evil" and criticism of the state', op. cit. (note 2), 19.

10   Ibid., 20.

11   Ibid., 22 [translation corrected].

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid.

14   Ibid., 23.

15   Ibid., 26: 'I have already said repeatedly that libertarian political theories do not distinguish themselves from authoritarian political theories because they do not acknowledge the risky "problematic nature" of the human animal.'

16   Ibid., 40 [translation changed].

17   Ibid., 42.

18   Ibid., 45.

19   Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita* (Milan: Einaudi, 2002), 116.

20   Ibid., 65.

21   The Solar Ass was one of the many animal-headed gods that Bataille found engraved on the Abraxas amulets of the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris; Georges Bataille, 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism', in: *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 48.

22   Ibid., 47.

23   Georges Bataille, 'The Sacred Conspiracy', in *Vision of Excess*, op. cit. (note 21), 181; original in Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée', in: *Œuvres complètes, Vol. I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 445.

24   Ibid., 13: 'For anyone undertaking a genealogical study of the concept of "life" in our culture, one of the first and most instructive observations to be made is that the concept never gets defined as such. And yet, this thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function in domains as apparently distant as philosophy, theology, politics, and – only later – medicine and biology. That is to say, everything happens as if, in our culture, life were what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided'.

25   Ibid., 16.

26   Ibid., 77.

27   Ibid., 80.

28   Ibid., 92.

29   Michel Foucault, 'Animality and Insanity', in: *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

A Conceptual Bestiary of the Commons

1   Project for the New American Century, 'Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources', report, September 2000, 51. Once available on the website: www.newamericancentury.org.

2   They do not constitute a plain *double articulation* as Deleuze and Guattari suggest in *A Thousand Plateaus* with their 'geological' paradigm animated by the figure of the lobster, whose claws are by nature actually asymmetrical! See: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004). For an extended application of a *materialism of strata* inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's, see: Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

3   James G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970). Notes by the author added in a reissue by RE/Search Publications, San Francisco, 1990. Republished by Harper Perennial, London, 2006.

4   Michel Serres, *Le parasite* (Paris: Grasset, 1980). Trad.: *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

5   DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, op. cit. (note 2).

6   Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit. (note 2), 553-554.

Chapter II
The Parasite of The Commons: Digitalism and the Economy of 'Free Culture'

The Biosphere of Machines: Enter the Parasite

1   See for instance: Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

2   'Space of flows' is a concept introduced by Manuel Castells in his book *The Informational City* in 1989 and means a new type of space, enabling synchronicity and real-time interaction without physical proximity. In 2001, Castells wrote: 'the space of flows . . . links up distant locales around shared functions and meanings on the basis of electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors, while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the space of places.' 'Informationalism and the

Network Society', in: Pekka Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* (New York: Random House, 2001), 155-178.

3 'Our societies are constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interactions, flows of images, sounds and symbols. Flows are not just one element of social organization: they are the expression of the processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life. . . . Thus, I propose the idea that there is a new spatial form characteristic of social practices that dominate and shape the network society: the space of flows. The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors.' Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 412.

4 Georges Batailles, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. I (New York: Zone, 1988).

5 Georges Batailles, *La part maudite* (Paris: Minuit, 1949). Translation: Ibid., 27.

6 Ibid., 21.

7 The idea of a *technological contract* inspired by Rousseau's social contract means the unconscious and implicit pact we subscribe with technological artefacts. Technological contract is the 'complicity' and the consensus around technology that are never discussed and culturally elaborated.

8 See: Robert Mitchell and Phillip Thurtle (eds.), *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

9 Batailles, *The Accursed Share*, op. cit. (note 4), 36. 'The space that labor and technical know-how open to the increased reproduction of men is not, in the proper sense, one that life has not yet populated. But human activity transforming the world augments the mass of living matter with supplementary apparatuses, composed of an immense quantity of inert matter, which considerably increases the resource of available energy.'

10 See: André Leroi-Gourhan, *L'Homme et la matière* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1943); and *Milieu et techniques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1945). As Deleuze and Guattari remind us: 'Leroi-Gourhan has gone the farthest toward a technological vitalism taking biological evolution in general as the model for technical evolution: a Universal Tendency, laden with all of the singularities and traits of expression, traverses technical and interior milieus that refract or differentiate it in accordance with the singularities and traits each of them retains, selects, draws together, causes to converge, invents'. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 499.

11 Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps, 1: La faute d'Epiméthée* (Paris: Galilée, 1994). Translation: *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998).

12 Science fiction has explored the different evolutions of the couple digital-analogue with the opposition of the two genres *cyberpunk* and *steampunk*.

13 See: Georges Batailles, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in: *Vision of Excess* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); and: Batailles, *The Accursed Share*, op. cit. (note 4).

14 Michel Serres, *Le parasite* (Paris: Grasset, 1980). Translation: *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 8.

15 Ibid., 5.

16 Ibid., 24.

17 Ibid., 10.

18 Ibid.

19 Jussi Parikka offers an example of 'parasitic media analysis', but focusing only on '(nonorganic) ways of network life': see Jussi Parikka, 'Contagion and Repetition: On the Viral Logic of Network Culture', *ephemera: theory and politics in organisation* 7.2 (2007), 287-308. Web: www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/7-2/7-2parikka.pdf

20 Serres, *The Parasite*, op. cit. (note 14), 36.

21 Ibid., 37.

22 Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri, 'Travail immatériel et subjectivité', *Futur Antérieur* no. 6, Summer 1991, Paris.

23 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit. (note 10), 490.

24   Ibid., 505.

25   See chapter 3 'The Geology of Morals' in: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit. (note 10): 'The strata are extremely mobile. One stratum is always capable of serving as the substratum of another, or of colliding with another, independently of any evolutionary order . . . Above all, between two strata or between two stratic divisions, there are interstratic phenomena: transcodings and passages between milieus, intermixings.' See also: Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

26   The TCP/IP protocol that invisibly runs Internet traffic is traditionally based on: physical layer, data link layer, network layer, transport layer, session layer, presentation layer, application layer. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OSI_model

27   Pekka Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* (New York: Random House, 2001).

28   Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une Critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). Translation: *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (Saint Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 146.

29   Jean Baudrillard, *L'Échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). Translation: *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988).

30   Ibid.

31   Ibid.

Digitalism: The Impasse of Media Culture

1   Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999).

2   Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, 'The Californian Ideology', *Science as Culture*, no. 26, volume 6, part 1, 1996, 44-72. Web: www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/theory-californianideology-main.html.

3   Google's famous corporate mission reads: 'Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.' See: www.google.com/corporate.

4   Nicholas Carr, 'Avatars consume as much electricity as Brazilians', *Rough type* (5 December 2006), www.roughtype.com/archives/2006/12/avatars_consume.php.

5   For a concentrate of pure digitalist credo see: Kevin Kelly, 'God Is the Machine', *Wired* 10.12, December 2002. Web: www.wired.com/wired/archive/10.12/holytech.html.

6   Karl Marx, *Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Vol. 1 (1867); translation: *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1981).

7   Quoting Winston Churchill at House of Commons, London, 28 October 1943: 'We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.'

8   See: Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); and: Ned Rossiter, *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions* (Rotterdam/Amsterdam: NAi Publishers/Institute of Network Cultures, 2006).

9   'GPL society means a formation of society, which is based on the principles of the development of Free Software', Project Oekonux definition, www.oekonux.org.

10   See: Michel Bauwens, 'The Political Economy of Peer Production', *Ctheory* (12 June 2005), www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=499.

11   See: Roger Clarke, 'Information Wants to be Free', 24 February 2000, web document: www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/II/IWtbF.html.

12   Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

13   Florian Cramer, *Words Made Flesh: Code, Culture, Imagination* (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2005).

14   A proper critique of digitalism and freeculturalism deserves a book apart. Another example of such a tendency and simplified political models is: Eben Moglen, 'The dotCommunist Manifesto', January 2003. Web: moglen.law.columbia.edu.

15   Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2007).

16   Lessig, *Free Culture*, op. cit. (note 12), 297.

17   Richard M. Stallman, *Free Software, Free Society: Selected Essays of Richard M. Stallman* (GNU Press, 2002). Web: www.gnu.org/doc/book13.html.

18 Lessig, *Free Culture*, op. cit. (note 12), 301.

19 See: www.crosscommons.org/acs.html, cyber.law.harvard.edu/media/scenario4, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_Compensation_System.

20 William Fisher, *Promises to Keep: Technology, Law, and the Future of Entertainment* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004). Especially chapter 6: 'An Alternative Compensation System'. Web: cyber.law.harvard.edu/people/tfisher/PTKChapter6.pdf; see also, William Fisher, 'Digital Music: Problems and Possibilities' (last revised: 10 October 2000). Web: www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/tfisher/Music.html.

21 Lessig, *Free Culture*, op. cit. (note 12), 303.

22 John Perry Barlow, 'The Next Economy of Ideas', *Wired* 8.10, October 2000. Web: www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.10/download.html.

23 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Web: www.benkler.org.

24 Florian Cramer, 'The Creative Common Misunderstanding', 2006. Web: www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0610/msg00025.html.

25 Anna Nimus (alias Dmytri Kleiner and Joanne Richardson), 'Copyright, Copyleft & the Creative Anti-Commons', December 2006. Web: subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/nimustext.html; and www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0612/msg00024.html.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Martin Hardie, 'Floss and the "Crisis": Foreigner in a Free Land?', *Sarai Reader* 04 Crisis/Media (Amsterdam-New Delhi: Sarai, 2004). Web: www.sarai.net/publications/readers/04-crisis-media/51martin_hardie.pdf.

30 Martin Hardie, 'Change of the Century: Free Software and the Positive Possibility', *Mute*, 9 January 2006. Web: www.metamute.org/en/Change-of-the-Century-Free-Software-and-the-Positive-Possibility.

31 Ibid.

32 Dmytri Kleiner, 'Copyfarleft and Copyjustright', *Mute*, 18 July 2007. Web: www.metamute.org/en/Copyfarleft-and-Copyjustright.

33 Paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari: 'It is not the same money that goes into the pocket of the wage earner and is entered on the balance sheet of a commercial enterprise.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 228.

34 See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_law_of_wages.

35 Kleiner, 'Copyfarleft and Copyjustright', op. cit. (note 32).

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Tiziana Terranova, 'Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy', in: *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004). Web: www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/voluntary.

42 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Web: www.benkler.org.

43 Ibid.

44 Dmytri Kleiner, 'WOS4: The Creative Anti-Commons and the Poverty of Networks'. *Review of Wizard of OS 4*, Berlin. Web: www.metamute.org/en/WOS4-The-Creative-Anti-Commons-and-the-Poverty-of-Networks.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 See Carr's post and Benkler's reply, in: Nicholas Carr, 'Calacanis's wallet and the Web 2.0 dream', *Rough Type*, 19 July 1999. Web: www.roughtype.com/archives/2006/07/jason_calacanis.php.

48 McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Web: www.
    hup.harvard.edu/catalog/warhac.html.
49 Ibid., 2.
50 Ibid., 309.
51 Ibid., 300.
52 Ibid., 164.
53 Ibid., 127.
54 Ibid., 173.

Rent: The Dystopian Parasite of Cognitive Capitalism

1   Mario Tronti put the basis of Italian Operaismo (also know as 'Autonomist Marxism' in the English-
    speaking context) in his seminal work *Operai e Capitale*, where he stated clearly this political turn:
    'We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second.
    This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start
    again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of
    socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles;
    it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own
    reproduction must be tuned.'. Mario Tronti, 'Lenin in England', in: Red Notes (eds.), *Working Class
    Autonomy and the Crisis: Italian Marxist Texts of the Theory and Practice of a Class Movement, 1964–79*
    (London: Red Notes/CSE Books, 1979). Originally published as 'Lenin in Inghilterra' in: Mario Tronti,
    Operai e capitale (Turin: Einaudi, 1966).
2   Antonio Negri and Carlo Vercellone, 'Il rapporto capitale/lavoro nel capitalismo cognitivo', *Posse*, 'La
    classe a venire', November 2007. Web: www.posseweb.net/spip.php?article17.
3   Carlo Vercellone, 'La nuova articolazione salario, rendita, profitto nel capitalismo cognitivo', *Posse*,
    'Potere Precario', 2006; translated by Arianna Bove, 'The new articulation of wages, rent and profit in
    cognitive capitalism', Web: www.generation-online.org/c/fc_rent2.htm.
4   The notion of 'social factory' is another key concept of Operaismo. See: Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, op.
    cit. (note 1).
5   All the workers have been co-opted in the speculative rent since their savings started to be invested
    in the stock exchange, as Christian Marazzi has clearly explained in his book *Capital and Language*,
    where the New Economy bubble itself is directly connected to the *financialization* of domestic savings
    started in the mid 1970s. See: Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to The
    War Economy* (New York: Semiotexte, 2008).
6   Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
7   See for example the Serpica Naro project: www.serpicanaro.com.
8   Richard Stallman, 'On Free Hardware', *Linux Today*, 22 June 1999. Web: features.linuxtoday.com/sto-
    ries/6993.html.
9   See the financialization of time in the futures contracts and the hypertrophy of derivatives. Marazzi
    connects the virtualization of finance to the creative power of language and collective beliefs: Ma-
    razzi, *Capital and Language*, op. cit. (note 5).
10 Antonella Corsani and Enzo Rullani, 'Production de connaissance et valeur dans le postfordisme',
    Multitudes, no. 2, May 2000, Paris [translation by the author]. Web: multitudes.samizdat.net/Produc-
    tion-de-connaissance-et.html. Original Italian version in: Yann Moulier Boutang (ed.), *L'età del capital-
    ismo cognitivo* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2002).
11 Enzo Rullani, *Economia della conoscenza: Creatività e valore nel capitalismo delle reti* (Milan: Carocci, 2004).
12 See also the notion of time-space compression as advanced in: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmo-
    dernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).
13 Rullani, *Economia della conoscenza*, op. cit. (note 11), 136.
14 On the relation between living systems and cognitive systems see: Ibid., 363.
15 For a definition of infrastructural technologies see: Nicholas Carr, 'IT doesn't matter', *Harvard Business
    Review*, May 2003. Web: www.roughtype.com/archives/2007/01/it_doesnt_matte.php; also in: Nicholas
    Carr, *Does IT matter? Information Technology and the Corrosion of Competitive Advantage* (Boston: Harvard

Business School Press, 2004): 'A distinction needs to be made between proprietary technologies and what might be called infrastructural technologies. Proprietary technologies can be owned, actually or effectively, by a single company. A pharmaceutical firm, for example, may hold a patent on a particular compound that serves as the basis for a family of drugs. An industrial manufacturer may discover an innovative way to employ a process technology that competitors find hard to replicate. A company that produces consumer goods may acquire exclusive rights to a new packaging material that gives its product a longer shelf life than competing brands. As long as they remain protected, proprietary technologies can be the foundations for long-term strategic advantages, enabling companies to reap higher profits than their rivals. Infrastructural technologies, in contrast, offer far more value when shared than when used in isolation. . . . The characteristics and economics of infrastructural technologies, whether railroads or telegraph lines or power generators, make it inevitable that they will be broadly shared – that they will become part of the general business infrastructure. . . . In the earliest phases of its buildout, however, an infrastructural technology can take the form of a proprietary technology. As long as access to the technology is restricted – through physical limitations, intellectual property rights, high costs, or a lack of standards – a company can use it to gain advantages over rivals.'

16   Herbert Simon was one of the first to define attention economy: 'In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.' Herbert Simon, 'Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World', in: M. Greenberger (ed.), *Computers, Communication, and the Public Interest* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971). See also: T. Davenport and J. Beck, *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

17   See: Marazzi, *Capital and Language*, op. cit. (note 5).

18   David Harvey, 'The art of rent: globalization and the commodification of culture', chapter in: *Spaces of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2001). And as 'The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly, and the Commodification of Culture', in: *A World of Contradictions: Socialist Register 2002* (London: Merlin Press, 2002). Web: socialistregister.com/recent/2002/harvey2002.

19   Paolo Virno, 'So-called "evil" and criticism of the state', in *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2008); original version: Paolo Virno, 'Il cosiddetto «male» e la critica dello Stato', *Forme di vita*, no. 4 (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2005).

20   Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter, 'Dawn of the Organised Networks', *Fiberculture* 5 - Precarious Labour, 2005. Web: journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/lovink_rossiter.html.

21   Geert Lovink, 'The Principles of Notworking', Inaugural speech, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2005. Web: www.hva.nl/lectoraten/documenten/ol09-050224-lovink.pdf; see also: Geert Lovink, 'Out-Cooperating the Empire? Exchange with Christoph Spehr', July 2006, Web: www.networkcultures. org/geert/out-cooperating-the-empire-exchange-with-christoph-spehr.

22   Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, 1858 (unpublished). Translation: *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973).

23   '22@ Barcelona project transforms two hundred hectares of industrial land of Poblenou into an innovative district offering modern spaces for the strategic concentration of intensive knowledge-based activities. This initiative is also a project of urban refurbishment and a new model of city providing a response to the challenges posed by the knowledge-based society.' Source: www.22barcelona.com; accessed September 2008.

24   See: www.mediaspree.de.

25   See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrej_Holm.

Chapter III
The Hydra of Language: The Biomorphic Unconscious of Culture Industry

Immaterial Civil War: Prototypes of Conflict within Cognitive Capitalism

1   William Gibson, 'In the visegrips of Dr. Satan (with Vannevar Bush)', talk, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002, Web: www.williamgibsonbooks.com/archive/2003_01_28_archive.asp.
2   Slogan of an Italian guerrilla marketing agency that was born as a spin-off of few Rome-based underground projects of the 1990s: See: www.guerrigliamarketing.it.
3   MyCreativity: Convention on International Creative Industries Research, 16-18 November, 2006, organized by the Institute of Network Cultures. Web: www.networkcultures.org/mycreativity.
4   Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent* (New York: Collins, 2005).
5   The DCMS category list consists of production in the following sectors: Advertising, Architecture, Art and Antiques Market, Crafts, Design, Designer Fashion, Film and Video, Interactive Leisure Software, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing, Software and Computer Services, Television and Radio. Source: www.wikipedia.org/Creative_industries.
6   Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947); translation: *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).
7   André Gorz, *Stratégie ouvrière et néocapitalisme* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1964); see also: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972). Keeping with that conceptualization, in 2003 Gorz published *L'immatériel*, a text about 'knowledge, value and capital' as its subtitle points out: André Gorz, *L'immatériel. Connaissance, valeur et capital* (Paris: Galilee, 2003).
8   The 'fragment on machines' from Marx's Grundrisse was mentioned by Raniero Panzieri for the first time in 'Plusvalore e pianificazione' and translated by Renato Solmi in the same issue of: *Quaderni Rossi*, no. 4 (Turin: Istituto Rodolfo Morandi, 1964).
9   Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973).
10 *Luogo Comune* was a political journal published between November 1990 and June 1993 (four issues). Collaborators were Paolo Virno, Giorgio Agamben, Franco Piperno, Antonio Negri, Sando Mezzadra and Sergio Bianchi.
11 *Futur Antérieur* was founded by Jean-Marie Vincent, Denis Berger and Toni Negri in 1990 (53 issues until 1998). Online archive: http://multitudes.samizdat.net/-Archives-Futur-Anterieur-.
12 Pierre Lévy, *L'intelligence collective. Pour une anthropologie du cyberespace* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994); translation: *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (Cambridge: Perseus, 1999). See also: Pierre Lévy, *Les technologies de l'intelligence* (Paris: La Découverte, 1990).
13 *Derive Approdi* magazine, 'Immaterial Workers of the World. Se non ora quando?', no. 18 (Rome: Derive Approdi, 1999). Web: www.deriveapprodi.org/estesa_rivista.php?id=44.
14 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Lavoro immateriale. Forme di vita e produzione di soggettività* (Verona: Ombre corte, 1997).
15 Christian Marazzi, *Il posto dei calzini. La svolta linguistica dell'economia e i suoi effetti sulla politica* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999).
16 Paolo Virno, *Grammatica della moltitudine. Per una analisi delle forme di vita contemporanee* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2002); translation: *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (New York: Semiotexte, 2004).
17 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
18 EuroMayDay is a political day of action against labour precarity promoted by a network of feminist, anti-capitalist and migrant groups and collectives in mostly Western Europe. It takes place on the 1st of May each year, May Day, traditionally a celebration of solidarity among workers across the world. EuroMayDay has been promoted as an attempt to 'update' the traditional May Day by focusing on flex and temp workers, migrants and other 'precarious' people living in Europe. See: www.euromayday.org.
19 'From the beginning San Precario was imagined as a détournement of popular tradition. This tradition is at once appropriated in the formal aspects and subverted in the contents. San Precario is the

mythopoetical patron saint of dispossessed but combative subjects , with the intention of rejuvenating the popular imagination of a fight for new social rights.' Source: www.chainworkers.org/sanprecario; see also: Marcello Tarì and Ilaria Vanni, 'On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives', *Fiberculture*, no. 5, 2005, Australia. Web: www.fibreculture.org.

20   Chainworkers , *Il precognitariato. L'europrecariato si è sollevato*, 12 November 2003, published online: www.rekombinant.org/old/article.html.sid=2184. See also: www.chainworkers.org.

21   Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Intermittents et précaires* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2008).

22   Peter Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to Our Changing Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

23   Fritz Machlup, *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

24   See also: Christian Fuchs, *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007).

25   Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Morrow, 1980).

26   Manuel Castells, *The Informational City. Information Technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989); and Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. I. (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

27   See: Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in: J.G. Richardson, *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

28   See: Max Nathan, 'Wrong in the Right Way? Creative Class Theory and City Economic Performance in the UK', in: Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter (eds.), *MyCreativity Reader: A Critique of Creative Industries* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2007).

29   Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissances de l'invention: La Psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l'économie politique* (Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2002); Maurizio Lazzarato, 'La psychologie économique contre l'Economie politique', *Multitudes* no. 7, 2001, Paris, web: multitudes.samizdat.net/La-Psychologie-economique-contre-l.html; see also: Maurizio Lazzarato: 'Invenzione e lavoro nella cooperazione tra cervelli', in: Y. Moulier Boutang (ed.), *L'età del capitalismo cognitivo* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2002).

30   Lazzarato, 'Invenzione', op. cit. (note 29), [translation by the author].

31   Ibid.

32   Enzo Rullani and Luca Romano, *Il postfordismo. Idee per il capitalismo prossimo venturo* (Milan: Etaslibri, 1998); Enzo Rullani, 'La conoscenza come forza produttiva: autonomia del post-fordismo', in: L. Cillario and R. Finelli (eds.), *Capitalismo e conoscenza* (Rome: Manifesto libri, 1998); Enzo Rullani, 'Le capitalisme cognitif: du déjà vu?', *Multitudes*, no. 2, 2000, Paris.

33   Enzo Rullani, *Economia della conoscenza: Creatività e valore nel capitalismo delle reti* (Milan: Carocci, 2004).

34   Antonella Corsani and Enzo Rullani, 'Production de connaissance et valeur dans le postfordisme', *Multitudes*, no. 2, May 2000, Paris. Original version: 'Produzione di conoscenza e valore nel postfordismo', in: Boutang, *L'età del capitalismo cognitivo*, op. cit. (note 29) [translation by the author]. Web: multitudes.samizdat.net/Production-de-connaissance-et.html.

35   Ibid.

36   Ibid. 396-397.

37   Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1962); quoted in: Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of Multitude*, op. cit. (note 16).

38   See: www.creativecommons.org/wired.

39   David Harvey, 'The art of rent: globalization and the commodification of culture', chapter, in: *Spaces of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2001); as 'The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly, and the Commodification of Culture', in: *A World of Contradictions: Socialist Register 2002* (London: Merlin Press, 2002). Web: socialistregister.com/recent/2002/harvey2002.

40   See: Jorge Ribalta, 'Mediation and Construction of Publics. The MACBA Experience', *Tranform*, April 2004, www.republicart.net/disc/institution/ribalta01_en.htm.

41 Ibid., 395.
42 Ibid., 396-397.
43 Ibid., 402.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 404-405.
46 Ibid., 405-406.
47 Ibid., 407.
48 Giorgio Agamben, *La comunità che viene* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990): translated by Michael Hardt: *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 65.
49 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Les révolutions du capitalisme* (Paris: Empêcheurs de Penser en rond, 2004), [translation by the author].
50 Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: Why the culture can't be jammed* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2004).

Creative Sabotage in the Factory of Culture: Art, Gentrification and the Metropolis

1 Antonio Negri, *Il dominio e il sabotaggio. Sul metodo marxista della trasformazione sociale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977); translation: *Dominion and Sabotage: On the Marxist Method of Social Transformation*, in: Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy* (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 258.
2 'The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image', in: Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), thesis 34. Original: *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967).
3 Henri Lefebvre, *La Révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); translation: *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
4 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947); translation: *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).
5 For a definition of 'biopolitical machine' see: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
6 Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996).
7 Ibid., xiii.
8 Ibid., 42.
9 Ruth Glass, *London: aspects of change* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964).
10 Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, op. cit. (note 6), 67.
11 Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
12 Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
13 Manuel Castells, 'Cultural identity, sexual liberation and urban structure: the gay community in San Francisco', in: Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 138-170.
14 Neil Smith, 'Gentrification in Berlin and the Revanchist State', interview, Mieterecho / Policing Crowds, 20 October 2007, http://einstellung.so36.net/en/ps/524.
15 See the pragmatic yet reactive book: Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2004).
16 Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', 1932, in: *Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1986): 'Very soon the Romanische Café accommodated the bohemians who, in the years immediately after the war, were able to feel themselves masters of the house. . . . When the German economy began to recover, the bohemian contingent visibly lost the threatening nimbus that had surrounded them in the era of the Expressionist revolutionary manifestoes. . . . The 'artists' withdrew into the background, to become more and more part of the furniture, while the bourgeois, represented by stock-exchange speculators, managers, film and theater agents, literary-minded clerks, began to occupy the place – as a place of relaxation. . . . The history of the Berlin coffeehouses is largely that of different strata of the public,

those who first conquered the floor begin obliged to make way for others gradually pressing forward, and thus to ascend the stage.'

17 See: See: http://einstellung.so36.net/en, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrej_Holm, http://annalist. noblogs.org.

18 See: Jorge Ribalta, 'Mediation and Construction of Publics: The MACBA Experience', *Republicart*, April 2004, http://republicart.net/disc/institution/ribalta01_en.htm; and the implosive criticisim of Anthony Davies, 'Take Me I'm Yours: Neoliberalising the Cultural Institution', *Mute Magazine*, 18 April 2007, www.metamute.org/en/Take-Me-Im-Yours.

19 Joaquim Jordà, *De nens*, 2004.

20 David Harvey, 'The Art of Rent: Globalization and the Commodification of Culture', in: *Spaces of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

21 See: www.22barcelona.com.

22 See: www.nau21.net; 'Can Ricart + Parc Central, urban space of 21th century', http://straddle3.net/ context/03/en/2005_06_10.html.

23 'No vas a tener casa en tu puta vida.' The original version sounds more sexist by using the term 'puta'. The movement got a lot of attention precisely by using a modern communication language. However, the first and successful slogan has been abandoned because of its sexist connotation. See http://bcn.vdevivienda.net.

24 'Ajuntament de Barcelona: Estadística: Evolució de la població. 1900-2006', http://www.bcn.es/estadistica/angles/dades/anuari/cap02/C0201010.htm.

25 See: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin-Gropiusstadt.

26 See: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediaspree, http://www.mediaspree.de.

27 See: http://www.mediaspree.de/Magazin.43.0.html.

28 See: http://www.ms-versenken.org.

29 See: 'The Right to the City - Soziale Kämpfe in der neoliberalen Stadt', conference, Berlin, 11-13 April 2008, http://www.buko.info/stadtraum/.

30 See: Merijn Oudenampsen, 'Amsterdam™, the City as a Business', in: BAVO (ed.), *Urban Politics Now: Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2007). And: Merijn Oudenampsen, 'Back to the Future of the Creative City: An Archaeological Approach to Amsterdam's Creative Redevelopment', *Variant*, no. 31, Spring 2008, Glasgow, http://www.variant.randomstate. org/pdfs/issue31/31CreativeCity.pdf.

31 See: http://www.urbanresort.nl.

32 See: Jeroen Boomgaard (ed.) *Highrise - Common Ground: Art and the Amsterdam Zuidas Area* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008). Web: http://www.valiz.nl/en/Highrise-CommonGround.

33 For more case studies in Europe, see: 'Contrapolis; or, Creativity and Enclosure in the Cities', workshop, Rotterdam, 26-27 March 2008, http://www.enoughroomforspace.org/projects/view/15.

34 See: The London Particular, 'Fear Death by Water: The Regeneration Siege in Central Hackney', *Mute Magazine*, 3 July, 2003, http://www.metamute.org/en/special-project-Fear-Death-by-Water; and: http://thelondonparticular.org.
    See also: http://www.metamute.org/en/taxonomy/term/3436.

35 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

36 Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, op. cit. (note 6).

37 See: http://www.euromayday.org.

38 See: http://seminaire.samizdat.net/Seminaire-Multitude-et-Metropole,106.html.

39 See also a partial transcription made by Arianna Bove of Negri's speech: http://www.generation-online.org/t/metropolis2.htm.

40 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, op. cit. (note 3).

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42 Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, op. cit. (note 6), 18.

43 Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', *October*, Vol. 31, (Winter, 1984), 91-111.

44 'The New York City Artist Homeownership Program', unpublished legal brief, page 1, quoted in Ibid.

45 Deutsche and Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', op. cit. (note 43).

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50 Ibid.

51 BAVO (ed.), *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007).

52 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 1936, in: *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

53 Antonio Negri, 'La moltitudine e la metropoli' in *Posse – 'Mappe politiche della moltitudine'* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2002); translated by Arianna Bove, 'The Multitude and the Metropolis', http://www.generation-online.org/t/metropolis.htm.

54 Negri, *Dominion and Sabotage*, op. cit. (note 1), 261.

55 Ibid., 285.

Chapter IV

The Bicephalous Image: The Just Masochism of the Imaginary

Neurology and Profanation of the Optical Unconscious

1 James G. Ballard, 'Does the angle between two walls have a happy ending?', Advertiser's Announcement, Sex: Inner Space, *Ambit* magazine, no. 33, 1967.

2 *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) is a two-hour documentary by Sophie Fiennes, scripted and presented by Slavoj Žižek. It explores a number of films from a psychoanalytic theoretical perspective.

3 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in: *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

4 Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity; A Particular History of the Senses* (New York/London: Routledge, 1993), 20.

5 Ibid., 29.

6 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', op. cit. (note 3).

7 Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', in: *Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1978).

8 James G. Ballard, 'A Neural Interval'. Advertiser's Announcement: A J.G. Ballard Production, *Ambit* magazine, no. 36, 1968.

9 Jean Baudrillard, 'Ballard's Crash' (1976). Translated by Arthur B. Evans, *Science Fiction Studies* 18: 313-20, no. 55, November 1991.

10 James G. Ballard, 'A Response to the Invitation to Respond', *Science Fiction Studies* 18: 329, no. 55, November 1991: 'I thought the whole problem SF faced was that its consciousness, critically speaking, had been raised to wholly inappropriate heights – the apotheosis of the hamburger. An exhilarating and challenging entertainment fiction which Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain would have relished has become a 'discipline' – God help us – beloved of those like the Delany who will no doubt pour scorn on my novel of the early '70s. The 'theory and criticism of s-f'!! Vast theories and pseudo-theories are elaborated by people with not an idea in their bones. Needless to say, I totally exclude Baudrillard (whose essay on Crash I have not really wanted to understand) – I read it for the first time some years ago. Of course, his *Amerique* is an absolutely brilliant piece of writing, probably the most sharply clever piece of writing since Swift – brilliancies and jewels of insight in every paragraph – an intellectual Alladin's cave. But your whole "postmodernism" view of SF strikes me as doubly

sinister. SF was ALWAYS modern, but now it is 'postmodern' – bourgeoisification in the form of an over-professionalized academia with nowhere to take its girlfriend for a bottle of wine and a dance is now rolling its jaws over an innocent and naive fiction that desperately needs to be left alone. You are killing us! Stay your hand! Leave us be! Turn your 'intelligence' to the iconography of filling stations, cash machines, or whatever nonsense your entertainment culture deems to be the flavor of the day. We have enough intellectuals in Europe as it is; let the great USA devote itself to the spirit of the Wrights – bicycle mechanics and the sons of a bishop. The latter's modesty and exquisitely plain prose style would be an example to you – especially his restrained but heartfelt reflections on the death of one of his sons, a model of the spirit animating SF at its best. But I fear you are trapped inside your dismal jargon.'

11   Baudrillard, 'Ballard's Crash', op. cit. (note 9).

12   Ibid.

13   See: André Leroi-Gourhan, *L'Homme et la matière* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1943); and: *Milieu et techniques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1945).

14   James G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970). Notes by the author added in a reissue by RE/Search Publications, San Francisco, 1990. Page numbers refer to the edition by Harper Perennial, London, 2006, 76.

15   Ibid., 7.

16   Walter Benjamin, 'One Way Street', in: *Reflections*, op. cit. (note 7), 86.

17   Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, op. cit. (note 14), 11.

18   Ibid., 13.

19   Ibid., 145.

20   Ibid., 156.

21   Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (London: William Heinemann, 1962).

22   Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, op. cit. (note 14), 116.

23   Ibid., 37.

24   Ibid., 119.

25   Ibid., 119.

26   Ibid., 148.

27   Ibid., 151.

28   Ibid., 150.

29   Benjamin, 'One Way Street', op. cit. (note 16), 86.

30   Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

31   Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, op. cit. (note 14), 149.

32   Ibid., 49.

33   Ibid., 124.

34   Ibid., 57.

35   Ibid., 95.

36   Ibid., 90.

37   Ibid., 54.

38   Ibid., 126.

39   Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (Paris: La Difference, 1981). Translation: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003).

40   Ibid., 15.

41   Francis Bacon, *Interviews*, 18: 'It is a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain.' Quote in Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, op. cit. (note 39), 26.

42   Ibid., 25.

43   Ibid., 28.

44   Ibid., 41.

45   Ibid., 43.

46   Ibid., 44.

47 Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).

48 As Maurizio Lazzarato points out in: *Videofilosofia. La percezione del tempo nel postfordismo* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1996), 207: 'La fortuna dei post-moderni, il loro compito ideologico è stato questo: far risaltare la sterilità del circuito attuale-virtuale, proprio nel momento in cui cominciava a mostrare tutta la sua potenza. «Scoperto» lo «spettacolo», quando stavamo entrando in una nuova dimensione, invece di indicare un nuovo terreno di scontro, le nuove poste in gioco, hanno «sedotto» e «affascinato» con le loro teorie sulla scomparsa del mondo. La situazione è radicalmente diversa. Non c'è più, come in Benjamin (nel fordismo), un dispositivo tecnologico per la produzione collettiva e un dispositivo tecnologico per la percezione collettiva. C'è, invece, un solo e medesimo dispositivo (le tecnologie numeriche) con cui percepiamo e lavoriamo, la cui materi prima non è il «tempo di lavoro», ma il «tempo in quanto tale».'

49 Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990). Translation: *Likeness and Presence: History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

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52 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: Universtiy of Chicago Press, 2005); W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: Universtiy of Chicago Press, 1986); W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Language of Images* (Chicago: Universtiy of Chicago Press, 1980).

53 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, op. cit. (note 49).

54 Ibid., 8.

55 Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, op. cit. (note 52).

56 Ibid., 11.

57 Ibid., 2.

58 Ibid., 52.

59 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, op. cit. (note 39), 44.

60 Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, op. cit. (note 52), 87.

61 Ibid., 89.

62 Ibid., 93.

63 Ibid., 170.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 307.

66 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979). Translation: *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

67 Ibid., see note 76.

68 Ibid., 81.

69 Ibid., 91.

70 Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova* (1295). Translation: *La Vita Nuova* (London: Penguin, 1969), quoted by Agamben, *Stanzas*, op. cit. (note 66), 90. 'At that very moment, and I speak the truth, the vital spirit, the one that dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that even the most minute veins of my body were strangely affected; and trembling, it spoke these words: "Here is a god stronger than I who comes to rule over me." At that point, the animal spirit, the one abiding in the high chamber to which all the senses bring their perceptions, was stricken with amazement and, speaking directly to the spirits of sight, said these words: "Now your bliss has appeared." At that point the natural spirit, the one dwelling in that part where our food is digested, began to weep, and weeping said these words: "O wretched me! For I shall be disturbed often from now on."'

71 Agamben, *Stanzas*, op. cit. (note 66), 94.

72 Ibid., 98.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 99.

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75 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanazioni* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2005). Translation: *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

76 Ibid., 105.

77 Ibid., 106.

78 Gilles Deluze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch: La Vénus à la fourrure* (Paris: Minuit, 1967). Translation: *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

79 Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è il contemporaneo* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2008) [translation by the author]: 'Contemporaneo è colui che riceve in pieno viso il fascio di tenebra che proviene dal suo tempo.'

I Like to Watch! Warpunk against Warporn

1 James G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970). Notes by the author added in a reissue by RE/Search Publications, San Francisco, 1990. Page numbers refer to the edition by Harper Perennial, London, 2006, 119.

2 Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

3 Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism: And Requiem for the Twin Towers* (London: Verso, 2002). Original: 'L'Esprit du terrorisme', *Le Monde*, 2 November 2001: 'If one does not take that into account, the event lost all symbolic dimension to become a pure accident, an act purely arbitrary, the murderous fantasy of a few fanatics, who would need only to be suppressed. But we know very well that this is not so. Thus all those delirious, counter-phobic exorcisms: because evil is there, everywhere as an obscure object of desire. Without this deep complicity, the event would not have had such repercussions, and without doubt, terrorists know that in their symbolic strategy they can count on this unavowable complicity.'

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6 George Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future* (Paris, 1930), 52, quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in: *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 238.

7 *Adbusters: Journal of the mental environment,* no. 71, 'The Beginnings of Sorrow', May/June 2007.

8 See: http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/mental_detox_week.

9 Download available on: www.churchofeuthanasia.org, website accessed in July 2008.

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4 See Florian Cramer, 'Sodom Blogging: Alternative Porn and Aesthetic Sensibility', in: K. Jacobs and M. Pasquinelli (eds.), *C'Lick Me: A Netporn Studies Reader* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2007).

5 Geert Lovink, 'Blogging, the nihilist impulse', in: *Zero Comments* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Web: www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-01-02-lovink-en.html.

6 One of the definitions proposed by 'The Art and Politics of Netporn' conference, Amsterdam, 2005, www.networkcultures.org/netporn.

7 Ballard, 'News From the Sun', op. cit. (note 1).

8 Mark Dery, *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium: American Culture on the Brink* (New York: Grove, 1999); and Mark Dery, *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (New York: Grove, 1996).

9   Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, 'The Obsession of the (Vanishing) Body', in: Jacobs and Pasquinelli, *C'Lick Me*, op. cit. (note 4).

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11   See for instance: 'Caslon Analytics: adult content industries' report, accessed June 2008, www.caslon. com.au/xcontentprofile.htm.

12   Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch: le froid et le cruel* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).

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25   Paolo Virno, 'So-called 'evil' and criticism of the state', in: *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2008). Original version: 'Il cosiddetto «male» e la critica dello Stato', *Forme di vita*, no. 4 (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2005).

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31   Ibid., 83.

32   Nicholas Carr, 'Avatars consume as much electricity as Brazilians', *Rough type* (5 December 2006), www.roughtype.com/archives/2006/12/avatars_consume.php.

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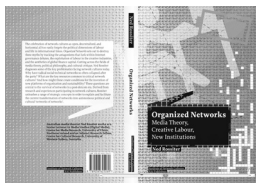
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ISBN 978-90-5662-526-9

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Eric Kluitenberg is a Dutch media theorist, writer and organizer. Since the late 1980s, he has been involved in numerous international projects in the fields of electronic art, media culture and information politics. Kluitenberg heads the media programme of De Balie, Centre for Culture and Politics in Amsterdam. He is the editor of the *Book of Imaginary Media* (NAi Publishers, 2006) and the theme issue 'Hybrid Space' of *OPEN*, journal on art and the public domain (2007).

ISBN 978-90-5662-617-5

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