



WORK, TIME AND WASTE: Perspectives on a Criticism of the Political Economy of the New Media

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Abstract:

The cruellest aspect of work is that it actually creates rather than rectifies a want. The metaphysical elevation of work offers a promise of paradise that in reality turns it into the threat of existence. The compulsory relationship between work and wage determines work as the means for the necessary meeting of needs. The capitalist organizational model create around this idea, by means of new communication technologies, a mystification figure, to whom surprisingly many are all too ready to succumb. The myth of collective intelligence basically mean submitting or adapting to the telematically determined system architectures and hierarchies of commands and processes. The establishment of the system of work, money, profit as recognition will shift from the Internet and the World Wide Web into individual spaces. The creation of a language of commands equip the media with the hierarchic building model of military commands which must to be followed as we see that corresponding to an entity of a number of heterogeneous, singular demands at the helm, is a task that has challenged the operational efficiency as this demand cannot be easily standardized or programmed at Virtual Reality. The condition is that the options presented are familiar, and that a balance between the options sought and the options offered can be formulated approximately. Staged subjectivity and imposed creativity are hidden in the roots of the demands for an aestheticisation of subsistence compulsions and the 'free subjugation' in the media's new hierarchy of dominance. The compulsory relation established with work in the society of spectacle, brings a growing of ongoing communicative self-presentation to create the history of a professional career and a narratable biography. The time rhythms that were linked to cumulative learning processes have been joined together in an impulsive moment of selective self-awareness and instant self-description. The requirements for a new 'innovative' social character, has led to disorganization of time categories. The situation is grief when we see the work paradox: further the unemployment question work alone should enable the acquirement of sufficient money, although it is precisely this that work is in fact no longer able to do. Moreover when the reason of the system, rationality of production and progress have come so far that work is a function of the self-organization of the system, the existing tiresome, unattractive, boring, annoying, even damaging or insufficiently recognized jobs which have to be done, brings us to a consequence based on a simple theory: working-time can no longer be the predominant social form of time. Of





course, today's concept of the 'new media' is nothing other than a conflict area in the struggle for radically different qualities of time.

Key words: Work; Time; Theory of the Media; Technologies of Communication; Language; Internet; Individual Spaces.

Resumo:

O aspecto mais cruel do trabalho é que ele mais cria do que retifica uma necessidade. Entretanto, o modelo organizacional capitalista para esta necessidade é crescentemente encoberto pela cultura e justificado esteticamente, especialmente por meios de novas tecnologias de comunicação que se propõem não-materiais. O estabelecimento do sistema de trabalho, dinheiro, lucro e reconhecimento vai se direcionar da Internet e da World Wide Web para espaços individuais. Os serviços anteriores são substituídos pela linguagem de comandos, que ocupa uma posição proeminente na Teoria da Mídia, esta que nota ainda uma forma bizarra da mediação, muito mais pelo computador do que pela linguagem. A demanda por responsabilidade mais pessoal ilustra até que ponto a pressão de constante auto-apresentação comunicativa cresceu e que tal fenômeno é uma compulsão inerente ao sistema. Hoje o tempo não é mais a forma de concretização do trabalho e seus equivalentes. É claro, o conceito atual de 'nova mídia' não é nada além de uma área de conflito na luta por qualidades de tempo radicalmente diferentes. Assim, o tempo de trabalho não pode mais ser a forma social predominante de tempo.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho; Tempo; Teoria da Mídia; Tecnologias de Comunicação; Linguagem; Internet; Espaços Individuais.

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The cruellest aspect of work is that it actually creates rather than rectifies a want. This is not merely historical experience but is symbolic of the metaphysical elevation of work. The promise of paradise that it offers constantly descends into the threat of its being taken away from those whose right to it has been forfeited, for whatever reason. At the same time, work is the hinge of the threat to existence. It defines, rewards, educates, orientates, punishes.

To be deprived of work these days is serious, simply because of the admittedly frightening fact that it is solely the - as yet unchanged - link between work and wage that determines the attainment of the means for the necessary meeting of needs. This compulsory





relationship is not a capitalist invention. I suspect that it is further evidence of the bogeyman of natural history.

However, the capitalist organisational model for this want, disguised as natural history, is increasingly glossed over by culture and aesthetically justified, not least by means of new communication technologies which purport to be 'immaterial' - a mystification figure, to whom surprisingly many are all too ready to succumb.

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Immateriality and the myth of collective intelligence, so often lauded in media ideologies as the inevitable effect of technology, basically mean submitting or adapting to the telematically determined system architectures and hierarchies of commands and processes. The establishment of the system of work, money, profit and recognition will shift from the Internet and the World Wide Web into individual spaces. At stake is the willingness, enforced by society, to learn the formatting of the new communication technologies with reference to one's own life, possessed and shown as a precondition for all conceivable qualifications, to a certain extent 'by one's own nature'.

Correspondingly, in the economy of information politics and nets, everything that happens is no longer meaningful without reference to culture and communication, and can no longer effect anything. The individual advance replaces the social safeguarding of work and hitherto standard contract conditions. The declaration of one's own as cultural achievement, which entitles one to admittance into the working world at the level of the latest technological standard, is dependent upon the individual's unpaid acquisition of qualification preconditions.

The previous services are replaced by the language of commands. This language occupies a prominent position in media theory, in which the final construction of the medium media - which bizarrely means the computer rather than language - seems to be equipped with the hierarchic building model of military commands. It also has its place in the symbolic-utopic decorations of standard media propaganda, for example in the incitement that "everybody must be connected".

Anyone uninvolved remains an outsider, stigmatised for failing to support progress. The oft-invoked collective intelligence (Pierre Lévy) - which propagates a universality without totality and which sees cyberspace virtual realities and free data flow as the embodiment





of the French Revolution's utopia of freedom - is based on compulsory postulates. Everyone must be linked to everyone else. S/he must both practice and attest to this, in reality and in keeping with updates. Subjectivity becomes a preordained condition of social possibilities, because the denial of hierarchies and mysticised horizontality of the communication utopias is unthinkable without the continuous demand that every member of the global information network continually redesign, define and simultaneously surpass him/herself in the supposedly free playful competition with others.

The fascination with this kind of surpassing unites 'right' with 'left' visions and versions of global net culture. Both collective cooperation and collective intelligence reproduce the conditions of a system feedback which permits no heterogeneous or diverse forms of time, no economies of waste and no insistence on a free but system-immanent uselessly spent-out time.

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The normal operational efficiency that should be continued as a business in the Internet usually acquires information by asking a representative group of people to respond to a brief compilation of questions and interests in the form of a list. The condition is that the options presented are familiar and that a balance between the options sought and the options offered can be formulated approximately. It is suggested that the global information society will be qualitatively dependent on the inclusion of more complex concepts. This can be illustrated by a completely different case, informative precisely because of its strangeness: the archaic bazaar. This represents a specific model of an information culture that functions in completely different ways to the operational efficiency of the factory and office.

It also works for tasks that have not yet been mastered in the global economy. The bazaar reveals hybrid forms of time-rhythms and expectations of use, a montage of heterogeneous interests and self-designs. Various cycles coexist, overlap, penetrate one another and break up again, e.g., stable and unstable, reversible constants and singulars, permanently localised and selective dislocated offers and demands. Unclear data or knowledge are the conditions and stipulations. The only available knowledge is that of the principal unable-to-know of concrete stipulations.





The quality of the product, the value relations and economy of prices, the diversity of the offers of the day with similar products and the stock limits of dissimilar products: all these factors change on a daily, and often hourly, basis. The market possibilities are linked to the ongoing positioning of everyone involved in the business and negotiations. They are located in a system with turbulence comparable to that on today's stock markets. The bazaar functions in a way that actually reduces the not-knowing for one person, increases it point by point for another and makes it permanently defensible for yet another. Information is not exchanged, but a basis that will enable negotiation is sought. It is in this search for information that the ethnologist Clifford Geertz identifies the central experience of the bazaar.

"Every aspect of the bazaar economy reflects the fact that the primary problem facing its participants (that is 'bazaaris') is not balancing options, but finding out what they are". (Geertz: 80) Trade and negotiation are multi-dimensional and intensive. The individual case is more important than the general rule, which fails to become concrete. The bazaar does not function by means of a brief list of options presented to a large number of people, but rather the opposite, with a large number of neuralgic questions put to just a handful of people. Conceptually, this form of subjective evaluation of abstract models has not yet been used for VR because it represents an entity of a number of heterogeneous, singular sizes at the helm, which cannot be easily standardised or programmed.

I believe that we should consider the demand for subjectivity, as reflected by these models, as a currency in the cultural habituation to digitalised over-expenditure of time. The vivacity of the bazaar – gesture, language, theatricality, presentation, in short: the culture of performance – is analogous and in opposition to the propagated values of the Internet society. What underlies this remains to be seen.

IV

Staged subjectivity and imposed creativity are hidden in the roots of the demands for an aestheticisation of subsistence compulsions and the 'free subjugation' in the media's new hierarchy of dominance. A decisive and decided change is underway. Symbolic self-discipline is replacing the industrial machine. Creativity is becoming a synonym for heteronomy: 'work' as 'worship', as ever. Today's attempts to stop work, itself the very crisis it appears to give rise to, are expressed no longer in respect to religion but in respect to immersion in a technology apparently permeated with religious fervour. Self-styling





offers promises of freedom, to the point where the drive for individuality asserts itself wastefully, as does its symbolic form, as a gigantic social machine.

This explains why images, projections and logos have replaced the iconoclastic machine of the industry as the motor of cultural development. In contrast, according to Henry Ford's organisation of work systems, the factory is society and vice versa. The desired synthesis between the micrological system of the ever faster and ever more perfect separation of work processes on the production line and the macroscopic system of consumer rationality according to wage has historically had two dangerous consequences, since both could turn out to be dysfunctional for society: firstly, the curtailment of the individual's power of autonomous decision-making, and secondly, the heightening of subjectivity determined by purchasing power.

These two strategies of self-assertion gratified in developed capitalism – the professional career and the narratable biography – were both fulfilled and endangered by numerous factors in Henry Ford's model. Recognition of work was increasingly linked to the staging of purchasing power, symbolic self-presentation and prestige. The outer representation enforced the pressure of subsistence – separated from work carried out according to the dictate of the strict feedback of optimised operational rationality. This model relied on the ideal of subjectivity, familiar from the middle-class 'Bildungsroman'.

The Ford model inevitably gave rise to the very crisis it strove to solve. It standardised professional qualification requirements with respect to people who simultaneously should have been acting as educated and culturally confident consumers in an autonomous sphere separated from work. The requirements of internal company negotiation were kept as brief and elementary as possible, given stereotypical form and modularisation, while the qualifications for the use of goods were based on complex education and cultural orientation ability.

Henry Ford's model ultimately came to grief because it breached a basic tenet common to both Karl Marx and capitalism: namely that alienation from work, or work in general, can only be productive if, however fragmented, it can be experienced as the development of subjectivity. Henry Ford's model fundamentally brings work into discredit, on all fronts: for the capital, work is merely an individual insurance of consumer subsistence.

To the worker him/herself, work is exactly the same, only disassociated. In this way, the mechanisation of work loses what makes it social – not least the pride people took in the fruits of their own (at least on a rudimentary level) labour. This is no longer possible in either Taylor or Ford's world. The well-trained, fragmented, disciplined, instrumentalised,





improved and used-up body is located in rest-niches, an interim figure between as yet un-mechanised processes.

V

Numerous social strategies now attempt to respond to this crisis. The society of spectacle has become the most successful model but remains ultimately useless because it intensifies rather than overcomes the crisis. With its permanent splitting up and off of energies into ever-more-delirious demonstrations of goods, luxury and consumerism, the society of spectacle has learnt its macro-economic lesson from Ford's failure. In this way, work increasingly disappears from the arsenal of life-long security providers, with the stock market and speculation increasingly taking its place. Subsistence itself becomes the capital that must be multiplied and thereby put in jeopardy, for reasons of growing poverty.

Investment of life resources becomes ever more careless. Only those who can prove their strength still belong to society. The stakes keep on rising. What exactly the intense strain of the efficient working day and the consequent increased value of the consumer existence really means is hard to understand fully at present, despite the fact that the theoretical fundamentals of the recommended risk games have already been vividly, precisely and cynically described by Guy Debord in "The Society of Spectacle" (written in 1967).

The imagination has been long since unequal to the delirious, incessant stream of ever-more-ambitious demonstrations in the society of spectacle. Similarly, ever since the law that money can no longer be converted into gold, and later, the introduction of floating rates of exchange, several times the gross national product, or national product in general, is turned over by stock exchange speculations every day. The delirious capital, the convulsion of life-time and the excesses of the society of spectacle mark the borders of a new territory, entirely remapped since the days of Marx and Smith, Taylor and Ford.

For all those who are now superfluous to society's processes, all that remains is to suffer and bear the pressure of an autonomy enforced by the system, for better or for worse. While they are busy working on their subjectivity and self-tasking, traditional and acquired subsistence rights with respect to the public are no longer recognised. No longer a factor, they appear to have become redundant.





VI

Attachment to the company, loyalty and the other resources of a production process founded on and in work have been dramatically devalued in the society of spectacle and the post-Ford economy of continuity and learning processes. This is proven most clearly by the 'job-hopping' trend of the last few years, the rapid job-change that no longer even merits the title 'work' because the respective requirements have always been preventatively delegated to individuals, who are situationally professionalised by constant self-education.

The computer also represents the fact that professions are no longer possible, nor even desired. The demand for more personal responsibility, even in the lower echelons of the dependent job world, illustrates the extent to which the pressure of ongoing communicative self-presentation has grown, and also shows that this is no one-off phenomenon but a system-immanent compulsion.

To the same extent that the macro-yardstick works towards a release from social duties, 'on the front' work is determined by the duty to self-organise according to company rules and the premise of return on capital. The progressive-seeming collapse of company hierarchies in favour of self-organising nets in organised teamwork basically means a continuously demonstrated compulsion to concretise achievement. The jumble of dynamic, risk-taking and creativity disguises the fact that the desired new, 'innovative' social character does not accord with a personal design but the unreasonable demand for flexibility determined by the system that radically differs from the concepts of Taylor and Ford, which seem social-romantic in contrast.

The reference to innovation, subjectivity, personal responsibility and dynamic also disguises the fact that the shift from the safety of the professional career and the compensation for the burden with a small but self-made security to the self-organising team with given efficiency values but without given organisational forms has led to the disorganisation of time categories, which has a variety of repercussions. Increasingly, every project and team starts off by dissimulating preliminary work and tradition. Superficially, 'job-hopping' is an interesting form of nomadism, analogous to the weightless surfing on the data waves of the digitalised information seas in the World Wide Web.





In fact, all time rhythms that were linked to cumulative learning processes have been joined together in an impulsive moment of selective self-awareness and instant self-description. It is precisely the freedom of organisation that must ensure the fulfillment of the goal stipulations – and, one must add, nothing else. It is not only life which has become economically superfluous because it can no longer be financed, but also the work itself that should have financed it. Politicians of all colours repeat the demand for a reduction in employment figures absurdly often, only to shift work as the most important medium of developing subjectivity back into the centre of existence. This illustrates the terrible fear mobilised mainly as a way of repelling the idea that meaningful social organisation can no longer rely on work, production and improvement, but instead on abstaining from work, doing nothing, disconnection and reduction.

Current capitalism no longer wishes to uphold its organisation of work in any way, but wishes instead to live on the proceeds of the shareholders. Although this is well-known, it has no consequences in work-philosophical terms. The obvious assumption is that politics is little more than the striving for the global dissimulation of this opinion. The real provocation is not so much the dominance of unemployment, but that work alone enables the acquirement of sufficient money, although it is precisely this that work is in fact no longer able to do. The reasons for this go far deeper than capitalism or the Protestant work ethic. The inevitable conclusion is that work must lose its significance, not just for the economy but also in thought and the imagination.

Since work is based on society, the obvious conclusion is that work and wage should no longer be the basic medium of socialisation. It also means (and this has hitherto not been fully appreciated) that there can no longer be any society broad enough to accommodate everyone as a useful component of the whole. In short, society can no longer serve as a whole because it no longer exists as a whole. The consequence of this is based on a simple theory: working-time can no longer be the predominant social form of time. The fact that capitalism has found no form for this, but has distorted the issue into destruction is what makes capitalism so wretched and proves its lack of imagination and its violent interpretation of time, reduced to the production time of serialised goods and values.

The destruction of values in war has today assumed the features of an insidious and initially cold civil war in Western Europe. Any criticism of contemporary economics must keep sight of this inevitable destruction, despite the distorting effect of these symptoms. This is not destruction in the traditional sense: it is the previous form of productivity that is in question.





VII

The basic criticism of previous economic theories of the values and metaphysics of an exclusively value-forming work originates with Georges Bataille, who has pursued it down a number of odd paths based on his theories on religion and cosmology. Bataille's model of economy is founded on a hopeless dialectic of want and waste, in which waste as the border of the world of productivity is planned either in the sense of a select few's right of disposal or an inconceivable example of negative destruction. In contrast, Bataille makes the elementary assumption that work was bound up with a paradoxical double want long before capitalism: the loss of energies unleashed by surplus, and the absence of a productive destruction of values in which surplus is no longer represented. Both forms of want are manifested as work.

According to Bataille, work must be nonetheless discontinuous. What the inevitable surplus of vitality cannot bear is what provides the constancy of work. Scandalously, Bataille maintains that the ills of the world are founded in its riches. It is specifically the riches of a particular type who asserts him/herself cosmologically as a waste of energies, also expressed in the fact that man is the result of a surplus of energy: "It is primarily the extreme riches of his/her higher developed activities that can be defined as a splendid release of surplus. Free energy blossoms in him/her and continuously demonstrates its useless magnificence".

To Bataille, economy is no longer the organ of the materialisation of lively activity, but the task of developing a form of time in which wasted time is conceivable. Bataille sees work, time and riches as expressions of energy. Every system produces more energy than it can use when it sees itself as the organisation of its own self-produced effects. If it fails to organise forms of productive destruction, the inevitable surplus of materialisation forces self-destruction that then brutally turns back on the basis of the system – as violence, unbridled abstraction which historically takes the form of war. Super-abundance is loss with no charge and nothing in return.

A lively system can either grow or waste itself pointlessly. Pointless waste is one goal of controlled loss that man could offer to super-abundance in order to prevent the fatality of want turning into negative destruction. Bataille's economy requires a new time ethos that he sees as a cosmological law. One must take one's time in considering the possible media-theoretical repercussions of the altered concepts. The limits of growth are potential rather than real. Liquefying surplus in order to keep realities virtual as a differential power of themselves requires an art of possibility, no longer in the sense of possession, constancy and preservation, and which no longer leaves the act of destruction





up to the dysfunctionalities of a system that is hysterically striving to make these dysfunctionalities inherently inconceivable.

Since no system can preserve, model or exchange energies beyond a certain point, it must expend them. This may occur as the destruction of the produced material values, but this is not the decisive factor. The decisive factor is that over-expenditure of energy represents a form of giving-back or giving-anew of time and energy to the enabling and nurturing forces.

VIII

Bataille's theory of economy is ultimately metaphysical, for understandable reasons. Bataille radicalises the structure of Polatsch, ethnologically examined by Marcel Mauss, which also refers back to the obsessions of the surrealist transgression in the Situationist Internationale - at the same time as Bataille's later work. Bataille radicalises Polatsch's concept insofar as giving becomes an act not just of waste beyond all calculation, but also an act of giving-back. Since it has existed throughout evolution, waste is unimportant. It is more significantly the giving-back that represents explicit and additional over-expenditure.

This ethos of giving-back takes the form of a break or a wasteful intensity, and no longer of a productive continuity or continuous productivity. In other words, it no longer takes the form of work and can no longer be converted into work. Over-expenditure and waste precede human existence. The increased productivity of work is unable to provide an insight into the form of time or the structure of the giving-back.

It is only this kind of time, in reflection and over-expenditure, that can form the natural evolutionary surplus of energy obstructed by work. Work clearly does not belong to the arts of waste and giving-back as experiences on the border. This is fully apparent in the current age, which seems utterly incapable of making work a break and a giving-back, a transformation of itself.





IX

When the reason of the system, rationality of production and progress have come so far that work is a function of the self-organisation of the system, we have reached a point where capitalism is no longer primarily an economic domain but a political one: a compulsory relationship. But nothing is resolved because it is based on asymmetry and does not allow for a smooth self-maintenance of the system. As ever, entropic deviations mean that basic functions exist in tiresome, unattractive, boring, annoying, even damaging or insufficiently recognised jobs.

Who collects the garbage? This question remains the inconclusive metaphor for the basic issue. The rational effects of the system may appear almost perfect, but the political and social compulsory form which links subsistence and therefore money with work and therefore rented time, still takes the archaic form of a permanent individual fatefulness. As yet, there is no job-share, no long-term functional elegance of the egalitarian or fair division of the necessary. The radical nature of the time-form sketched here as a proposal for life as waste has failed as yet necessarily and systematically because of the link between work and wage.

System forming and recognised forms of doing nothing have been neither found nor sought. So unemployment is the biggest human, economic and social problem? No, it is the ultimate utopia - an attempt to give oneself the task with which life can organise itself as over-expenditure. Today time is no longer the form of the concretising of work and its equivalents – subsistence and social recognition – but a medium of cultural conflicts that are basically political.

This goes far beyond repairs to the time dictate of shortness, which are expressed in the presumptuous attempt to allow everyone to choose and modulate timetables themselves. Of course, today's concept of the 'new media' is nothing other than a conflict area in the struggle for radically different qualities of time.

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