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The Flexible Personality

For a New Cultural Critique

Brian Holmes

"I wrote 'The Flexible Personality' in 2001, on the basis of research accumulated during the boom years of the so-called 'new economy.' The text emphasizes the cultural, soft-power aspects of the new social paradigm, in keeping with the expansive mood of the Clinton years in the U.S. and the tolerant forms of social democracy then prominent in Western Europe. Yet the technological apparatus it describes has only been more fully developed since that time, while its cultural justifications have merely twisted to reflect a more callous opportunism. Since 2001, what we have seen throughout the world is a full implementation of the flexible employment system, that is, of a labor regime in which worker mobility and variable hours are accompanied by continuous electronic surveillance and the managerial analysis of performance. To observe this, it's not enough to watch the corporate officers strutting around airports with their portable telephones, wireless PCs and PDAs; you must also look more deeply into all the instrumentation of the workplace, such as biometric identification devices, keystroke counting programs, electronic tracking badges that follow people around a factory floor, GPS sensors for the control of vehicle fleets, etc. All these technological systems involve people in a new relation between controller and controlled. Despite the stock-market crash that ostensibly put an end to the new economy, what we are faced with is an enduring change

in the way that work is managed and waged, and in the social psychology that accompanies it. These transformations are now being extended to the control of population flows across national borders, where it is also a matter of the continuous identification and tracking of mobile individuals. And similar considerations apply to consumer profiling in the interests of targeted advertising and high-performance seduction. In all these respects, the only thing that has really changed since I wrote the essay is the intensification of the processes described in it."

Excerpts from an interview of Brian Holmes by Robby Herbst, Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, Winter 2005.

The events of the century's turn, from Seattle to New York, have shown that a sweeping critique of capitalist globalization is possible, and urgently necessary—before the level of violence in the world dramatically increases. The beginnings of such a critique exist, with the renewal of "unorthodox" economics.[1] But now one can look further, toward a critique of contemporary capitalist culture.

To be effective, a cultural critique must show the links between the major articulations of power and the more-or-less trivial aesthetics of everyday life. It must reveal the systematicity of social relations and their compelling character for everyone involved, even while it points to the specific discourses, images and emotional attitudes that hide inequality and raw violence. It must shatter the balance of consent, by flooding daylight on exactly what a society consents to, how it tolerates the intolerable. Such a critique is difficult to put into practice because it must work on two opposed levels, coming close enough to grips with the complexity of social processes to convince the researchers whose specialized knowledge it needs, while finding striking enough expressions of its

conclusions to sway the people whom it claims to describe—those upon whose behavior the transformation of the status quo depends.

This kind of critique existed very recently in our societies, it gave intellectual focus to an intense and widespread dissatisfaction in the sixties and seventies, it helped change an entire system. Today it seems to have vanished. No longer does the aesthetic dimension appear as a contested bridge between the psyche and the objective structures of society. It is as though we had lost the taste for the negative, the ambition of an anti-systemic critique. In its place we find endless variants on Anglo-American "cultural studies"—which is an affirmative strategy, a device for adding value, not for taking it away. The history of cultural studies argues today for a renewal of the negative, of ideology critique.

When it emerged in the late fifties, British cultural studies tried to reverse aesthetic hierarchies by turning the sophisticated language of literary criticism onto working-class practices and forms. Elevating popular expressions by a process of contamination that also transformed the elite culture, it sought to create positive alternatives to the new kinds of domination projected by the mass media. The approach greatly diversified the range of legitimate subjects and academic styles, thereby making a real contribution to the ideal of popular education.[2] What is more, cultural studies constituted a veritable school on the intellectual left, developing a strategic intention. However, its key theoretical tool was the notion of a differential reception, or "negotiated reading"—a personal touch given to the message by the receiver. The notion was originally used to reveal working-class interpretations of dominant messages, in a model still based on class consciousness.[3] But when the emphasis on reception was detached from the dynamics of class, in the course of the 1980s, cultural studies became one long celebration of the particular twist that each

individual or group could add to the globalized media product. In this way, it gave legitimacy to a new, transnational consumer ideology.[4] This is the discourse of alienation perfected, appropriated, individualized, ethnicized, made one's own.

How can cultural critique become effective again today? I am going to argue for the construction of an "ideal type," revealing the intersection of social power with intimate moral dispositions and erotic drives.[5] I call this ideal type the flexible personality. The word "flexible" alludes directly to the current economic system, with its casual labor contracts, its just-in-time production, its informational products and its absolute dependence on virtual currency circulating in the financial sphere. But it also refers to an entire set of very positive images, spontaneity, creativity, cooperativity, mobility, peer relations, appreciation of difference, openness to present experience. If you feel close to the counter-culture of the sixties-seventies, then you can say that these are our creations, but caught in the distorting mirror of a new hegemony. It has taken considerable historical effort from all of us to make the insanity of contemporary society tolerable.

I am going to look back over recent history to show how a form of cultural critique was effectively articulated in intellectual and then in social terms, during the post-World War II period. But I will also show how the current structures of domination result, in part, from the failures of that earlier critique to evolve in the face of its own absorption by contemporary capitalism.

Question Authority

The paradigmatic example of cultural critique in the postwar period is the Institut für Sozialforschung—the autonomous

scholarly organization known as the Frankfurt School. Its work can be summed up with the theoretical abbreviation of Freudo-Marxism. But what does that mean? Reviewing the texts, you find that from as early as 1936, the Institut articulated its analysis of domination around the psychosociological structures of authority. The goal of the *Studien über Autorität und Familie* was to remedy "the failure of traditional Marxism to explain the reluctance of the proletariat to fulfill its historical role."[6] This "reluctance"—nothing less than the working-class embrace of Nazism—could only be understood through an exploration of the way that social forces unfold in the psyche. The decline of the father's authority over the family, and the increasing role of social institutions in forming the personality of the child, was shown to run parallel to the liquidation of liberal, patrimonial capitalism, under which the nineteenth-century bourgeois owner directly controlled an inherited family capital. Twentieth-century monopoly capitalism entailed a transfer of power from private individuals to organized, impersonal corporations. The psychological state of masochistic submission to authority, described by Erich Fromm, was inseparable from the mechanized order of the new industrial cartels, their ability to integrate individuals within the complex technological and organizational chains of mass-production systems. The key notion of "instrumental reason" was already in germ here. As Marcuse wrote in 1941: "The facts directing man's thought and action are... those of the machine process, which itself appears as the embodiment of rationality and expediency.... Mechanized mass production is filling the empty spaces in which individuality could assert itself."[7]

The Institut's early work combined a psychosociological analysis of authoritarian discipline with the philosophical notion of instrumental reason. But its powerful anti-systemic critique could

not crystallize without studies of the centrally planned economy, conceived as a social and political response to the economic crisis of the 1930s. Institut members Friedrich Pollock and Otto Kirchheimer were among the first to characterize the new "state capitalism" of the 1930s.[8] Overcoming the traditional Marxist portrayal of monopoly capitalism, which had met its dialectical contradiction in the crisis of 1929, they described a definitive shift away from the liberal system where production and distribution were governed by contractualized market relations between individual agents. The new system was a managerial capitalism where production and distribution were calculated by a central-planning state. The extent of this shift was confirmed not only by the Nazi-dominated industrial cartels in Germany, but also by the Soviet five-year plans, or even the American New Deal, anticipating the rise of the Keynesian welfare state. Authority was again at the center of the analysis. “Under state capitalism,” wrote Pollock, “men meet each other as commander or commanded.”[9] Or, in Kirchheimer’s words: “Fascism characterizes the stage at which the individual has completely lost his independence and the ruling groups have become recognized by the state as the sole legal parties to political compromise.”1[10]

The resolution of economic crisis by centralized planning for total war concretely revealed what Pollock called the "vital importance" of an investigation "as to whether state capitalism can be brought under democratic control." This investigation was effectively undertaken by the Institut during its American exile, when it sought to translate its analysis of Nazism into the American terms of the Cold War. What we now remember most are the theory and critique of the culture industry, and the essay of that name; but much more important at the time was a volume of sociological research called *The Authoritarian Personality*, published in 1950.[11]

Written under Horkheimer's direction by a team of four authors including Adorno, the book was an attempt to apply statistical methods of sociology to the empirical identification of a fascistic character structure. It used questionnaire methods to demonstrate the existence of a “new anthropological type” whose traits were rigid conventionalism, submission to authority, opposition to everything subjective, stereotypy, an emphasis on power and toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, the projection outside the self of unconscious emotional impulses, and an exaggerated concern with sexual scandal. In an echo to the earlier study of authority, these traits were correlated with a family structure marked not by patriarchal strength but rather weakness, resulting in attempts to sham an ascendancy over the children which in reality had devolved to social institutions.

The Authoritarian Personality represents the culmination of a deliberately programmed, interdisciplinary construction of an ideal type: a polemical image of the social self which could then guide and structure various kinds of critique. The capacity to focus different strands of critique is the key function of this ideal type, whose importance goes far beyond that of the statistical methodologies used in the questionnaire-study. Adorno's rhetorical and aesthetic strategies, for example, only take on their full force in opposition to the densely constructed picture of the authoritarian personality. Consider this quote from the essay on *Commitment* in 1961:

> Newspapers and magazines of the radical Right constantly stir up indignation against what is unnatural, over-intellectual, morbid and decadent: they know their readers. The insights of social psychology into the authoritarian personality confirm them. The basic features of this type include conformism, respect for a petrified façade of opinion and society, and resistance to impulses

that disturb its order or evoke inner elements of the unconscious that cannot be admitted. This hostility to anything alien or alienating can accommodate itself much more easily to literary realism of any provenance, even if it proclaims itself critical or socialist, than to works which swear allegiance to no political slogans, but whose mere guise is enough to disrupt the whole system of rigid coordinates that governs authoritarian personalities...[12]

Adorno seeks to show how Brechtean or Sartrean political engagement could shade gradually over into the unquestioning embrace of order that marks an authoritarian state. The fractured, enigmatic forms of Beckett or Schoenberg could then be seen as more politically significant than any call to rally collectively around a cause. Turned at once against the weak internal harmonies of a satisfied individualism, and against the far more powerful totalizations of an exploitative system, aesthetic form in Adorno's vision becomes a dissenting force through its refusal to falsely resolve the true contradictions. As he writes in one of his rhetorical phrases: "It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads."[13]

The point is not to engage in academic wrangling over exactly how Adorno conceived this resistance of contradictory forms. More interesting is to see how a concerted critique can help give rise to effective resistance in society. The most visible figure here is Herbert Marcuse, whose 1964 book *One-Dimensional Man* became an international best-seller, particularly in France. Students in the demonstrations of May '68 carried placards reading "Marx, Mao, Marcuse." But this only shows how Marcuse, with his directly revolutionary stance, could become a kind of emblem for converging critiques of the authoritarian state, industrial discipline

and the mass media. In France, Sartre had written of "serialized man," while Cornelius Castoriadis developed a critique of bureaucratic productivism. In America, the business writer William Whyte warned against the "organization man" as early as 1956, while in 1961 an outgoing president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, denounced the technological dangers of the "military-industrial complex." Broadcast television was identified as the major propaganda tool of capitalism, beginning with Vance Packard's book *The Hidden Persuaders* in America in 1957, then continuing more radically with Barthes' *Mythologies* in France and above all, Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Ivan Illich and Paul Goodman attacked school systems as centers of social indoctrination, R.D. Laing and Félix Guattari called for an anti-psychiatry, and Henri Lefebvre for an anti-urbanism, which the Situationists put into effect with the practice of the dérive. In his Essay on *Liberation*, written immediately after '68, Marcuse went so far as to speak of an outbreak of somethng like mass surrealism—which, he thought, could combine with a rising of the racialized lumpen proletariat in the US and a wider revolt of the Third World.

I don't mean to connect all this subversive activity directly to the Frankfurt School. But the "Great Refusal" of the late sixties and early seventies was clearly aimed at the military-industrial complexes, at the regimentation and work discipline they produced, at the blandishments of the culture industry that concealed these realities, and perhaps above all, at the existential and psychosocial condition of the "authoritarian personality." The right-wing sociologist Samuel Huntington recognized as much, when he described the revolts of the 1960s as "a general challenge to the existing systems of authority, public and private."[14] But that was just stating the obvious. In seventies America, the omnipresent counter-culture slogan was "Question Authority."

What I have tried to evoke here is the intellectual background of an effective anti-systemic movement, turned against capitalist productivism in its effects on both culture and subjectivity. All that is summed up in a famous saying of the time, On ne peut pas tomber amoureux d'une courbe de croissance ("You can't fall in love with a growth curve"). In its very erotics, that writing on the walls of May '68 suggests what I have not yet mentioned, which is the positive content of the anti-systemic critique: a desire for equality and social unity, for the suppression of the class divide. Self-management and direct democracy were the fundamental demands of the student radicals in 1968, and by far the most dangerous feature of their leftist ideology.[15] As Jürgen Habermas wrote in 1973: "Genuine participation of citizens in the processes of political will-formation, that is, substantive democracy, would bring to consciousness the contradiction between administratively socialized production and the continued private appropriation and use of surplus value."[16] In other words, increasing democratic involvement would rapidly show people where their real interests lie. Again, Huntington seemed to agree, when he in turn described the "crisis" of the advanced societies as "an excess of democracy."[17]

One might recall that the infamous 1975 Trilateral Commission report in which Huntington made that remark was specifically concerned with the growing "ungovernability" of the developed societies, in the wake of the social movements of the sixties. One might also recall that this specter of ungovernability was precisely the foil against which Margaret Thatcher, in England, was able to marshal up her "conservative revolution."[18] In other words, what Huntington called "the democratic distemper" of the sixties was the background against which the present neoliberal hegemony arose. And so the question I would now like to ask is this: how did

the postindustrial societies absorb the "excess of democracy" that had been set loose by the anti-authoritarian revolts? Or to put it another way: how did the 1960s finally serve to make the 1990s tolerable?

Divide and Recuperate

"We lack a serious history of co-optation, one that understands corporate thought as something other than a cartoon," writes the American historian and culture critic Thomas Frank.[19] In a history of the advertising and fashion industries called *The Conquest of Cool*, he attempts to retrieve the specific strategies that made sixties "hip" into nineties "hegemon," transforming cultural industries based on stultifying conformism into even more powerful industries based on a plethoric offer of "authenticity, individuality, difference, and rebellion." With a host of examples, he shows how the desires of middle-class dropouts in the sixties were rapidly turned into commodified images and products. Avoiding a simple manipulation theory, Frank concludes that the advertisers and fashion designers involved had an existential interest in transforming the system. The result was a change in "the ideology by which business explained its domination of the national life"—a change he relates, but only in passing, to David Harvey's concept of "flexible accumulation."[20] Beyond the chronicle of stylistic co-optation, what still must be explained are the interrelations between individual motivations, ideological justifications and the complex social and technical functions of a new economic system.

A starting point can be taken from a few suggestive remarks by the business analysts Piore and Sabel, in a book called *The Second Industrial Divide* (1984). Here the authors speak of a regulation

crisis, which "is marked by the realization that existing institutions no longer secure a workable match between the production and the consumption of goods."[21] They locate two such crises in the history of the industrial societies, both of which we have already considered through the eyes of the Frankfurt School: "the rise of the large corporations, in the late nineteenth century, and of the Keynesian welfare state, in the 1930s" (p. 5). Our own era has seen a third such crisis: the prolonged recession of the 1970s, culminating with the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, and accompanied by endemic labor unrest throughout the decade. This crisis provoked the institutional collapse of the Fordist mass-production regime and the welfare state, and thereby set the stage for an industrial divide, which the authors situate in the early 1980s:

> "The brief moments when the path of industrial development itself is at issue we call industrial divides. At such moments, social conflicts of the most apparently unrelated kinds determine the direction of technological development for the following decades. Although industrialists, workers, politicians, and intellectuals may only be dimly aware that they face technological choices, the actions that they take shape economic institutions for long into the future. Industrial divides are therefore the backdrop or frame for subsequent regulation crises." (p. 5)

Basing themselves on observations from Northern Italy, the authors describe the emergence of a new production regime called "flexible specialization," which they characterize as "a strategy of permanent innovation: accommodation to ceaseless change, rather than an effort to control it" (p. 16).

Abandoning the centralized planning of the postwar years, this new strategy works through the agency of small, independent

production units, employing skilled work teams with multi-use tool kits and relying on relatively spontaneous forms of cooperation with other such teams to meet rapidly changing market demands at low cost and high speed. These kinds of firms seemed to hark back to the social relations between craftsmen in the early nineteenth century, before the first industrial divide that led to the introduction of heavy machinery and the mass-production system. [22] But the reality, within and beyond Northern Italy, has proven more complex, and in 1984 Piore and Sabel could not yet have predicted the subjective and organizational importance that would be acquired by a single set of products, far from anything associated with the nineteenth century: the personal computer and telecommunications devices.[23]Nonetheless, the relation they drew between a crisis in institutional regulation and an industrial divide can help us understand the key role that social conflict—and the cultural critique that helps focus it—has played in shaping the organizational forms and the very technology of the world we live in.

What then were the conflicts that made computing and telecommunications into the central products of the new wave of economic growth that began after the 1970s recession? How did these conflicts affect the labor, management and consumption regimes? Which social groups were integrated to the new hegemony of flexible capitalism, and how? Which were rejected or violently excluded, and how was that violence covered over?

So far, the most suggestive set of answers to these questions has come from Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, in *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*, published in 1999.[24] Their thesis is that each age or "spirit" of capitalism must justify its irrational compulsion for accumulation by at least partially integrating or "recuperating" the critique of the previous era, so that the system can become

tolerable again—at least for its own managers. They identify two main challenges to capitalism: the critique of exploitation, or what they call "social critique," developed traditionally by the worker's movement, and the critique of alienation, or what they call "artistic critique." The latter, they say, was traditionally a minor, literary affair; but it became vastly more important with the mass cultural education carried out by the welfare-state universities. Boltanski and Chiapello trace the destinies of the major social groups in France after the turmoil of '68, when critique sociale joined hands with critique artiste. They show how the most organized fraction of the labor force was accorded unprecedented economic gains, even as future production was gradually reorganized and delocalized to take place outside union control and state regulation. But they also demonstrate how the young, aspiring managerial class, whether still in the universities or at the lower echelons of enterprise, became the major vector for the artistic critique of authoritarianism and bureaucratic impersonality. The strong point of Boltanski and Chiapello's book is to demonstrate how the organizational figure of the network emerged to provide a magical answer to the anti-systemic cultural critique of the 1950s and 60s—a magical answer, at least for the aspirant managerial class.

What are the social and aesthetic attractions of networked organization and production?

First, the pressure of a rigid, authoritarian hierarchy is eased, by eliminating the complex middle-management ladder of the Fordist enterprises and opening up shifting, one-to-one connections between network members. Second, spontaneous communication, creativity and relational fluidity can be encouraged in a network as factors of productivity and motivation, thus overcoming the alienation of impersonal, rationalized procedures. Third, extended mobility can be tolerated or even demanded, to the extent that

tool-kits become increasingly miniaturized or even purely mental, allowing work to be relayed through telecommunications channels. Fourth, the standardization of products that was the visible mark of the individual's alienation under the mass-production regime can be attenuated, by the configuration of small-scale or even micro-production networks to produce limited series of custom objects or personalized services.[25] Fifth, desire can be stimulated and new, rapidly obsolescent products can be created by working directly within the cultural realm as coded by multimedia in particular, thus at once addressing the demand for meaning on the part of employees and consumers, and resolving part of the problem of falling demand for the kinds of long-lasting consumer durables produced by Fordist factories.

As a way of summing up all these advantages, it can be said that the networked organization gives back to the employee—or better, to the "prosumer"—the property of him- or herself that the traditional firm had sought to purchase as the commodity of labor power. Rather than coercive discipline, it is a new form of internalized vocation, a "calling" to creative self-fulfillment in and through each work project, that will now shape and direct the employee's behavior. The strict division between production and consumption tends to disappear, and alienation appears to be overcome, as individuals aspire to mix their labor with their leisure.[26] Even the firm begins to conceive of work qualitatively, as a sphere of creative activity, of self-realization. "Connectionist man"—or in my term, the "networker"—is delivered from direct surveillance and paralyzing alienation to become the manager of his or her own self-gratifying activity, as long as that activity translates at some point into valuable economic exchange, the sine qua non for remaining within the network.

Obviously, the young advertisers and fashion designers described by Thomas Frank could see a personal interest in this loosening of hierarchies. But the gratifying self-possession and self-management of the networker has an ideological advantage as well: responding to the demands of May '68, it becomes the perfect legitimating argument for the continuing destruction, by the capitalist class, of the heavy, bureaucratic, alienating, profit-draining structures of the welfare state that also represented most of the historical gains that the workers had made through social critique. By co-opting the aesthetic critique of alienation, the culture of the networked enterprise was able to legitimate the gradual exclusion of the workers' movement and the destruction of social programs. Thus —through the process that Raymond Williams calls the "selective tradition"[27]—a selective, tendentious version of artistic critique emerged as one of the linchpins of the new hegemony invented in the early 1980s by Reagan and Thatcher, and perfected in the 1990s by Clinton and the inimitable Tony Blair.

To recuperate from the setbacks of the sixties and seventies, capitalism had to be become doubly flexible, imposing casual labor contracts and "delocalized" production sites to escape the regulation of the welfare state, and using this fragmented production apparatus to create the consumer seductions and stimulating careers that were needed to regain the loyalty of potentially revolutionary managers and intellectual workers. This double movement is what gives rise to the system conceived by David Harvey as a regime of "flexible accumulation"—a notion that describes not only the structure and discipline of the new work processes, but also the forms and lifespans of the individually tailored and rapidly obsolescent products, as well as the new, more volatile modes of consumption that the system promotes.[28] For the needs of contemporary cultural critique we should recognize, at

the crux of this transformation, the role of the personal computer, assembled along with its accompanying telecommunications devices in high-tech sweatshops across the world. Technically a calculator, based on the most rigid principles of order, the personal computer has been turned by its social usage into an image- and language machine: the productive instrument, communications vector and indispensable receiver of the immaterial goods and semiotic or even emotional services that now form the leading sector of the economy.[29]

The computer and its attendant devices are at once industrial and cultural tools, embodying a compromise between control and creativity that has temporarily resolved the cultural crisis unleashed by artistic critique. Freedom of movement, which can be idealized in the figures of nomadism and roving desire, is one of the central features of this compromise. The laptop computer frees the skilled intellectual worker or the nomadic manager for forms of mobility both physical and fantasmatic, while at the same time serving as a portable instrument of control over the casualized laborer and the fragmented production process; it successfully miniaturizes one's access to the remaining bureaucratic functions, while also opening a private channel into the realms of virtual or "fictitious" capital, the financial markets where surplus value is produced as if by magic, despite the accumulating signs of environmental decay. In this way, the organizational paradigm of the network grants an autonomy which can be channeled into a new productive discipline, wherein the management of social relations over distance is a key factor, constantly open to a double interpretation. To recognize this profound ambivalence of the networked computer—that is, the way its communicative and creative potentials have been turned into the basis of an ideology masking its remote control functions—is to recognize the substance and the

fragility of the hegemonic compromise on which the flexible accumulation regime of globalizing capital has been built.

Geographical dispersal and global coordination of manufacturing, just-in-time production and containerized delivery systems, a generalized acceleration of consumption cycles, and a flight of overaccumulated capital into the lightning-fast financial sphere, whose movements are at once reflected and stimulated by the equally swift evolution of global media: these are among the major features of the flexible accumulation regime as it has developed since the late 1970s. David Harvey, in quintessential Marxist fashion, sees this transnational redeployment of capital as a reaction to working-class struggles, which increasingly tended to limit the levels of resource and labor exploitation possible within nationally regulated space. A similar kind of reasoning is used by Piore and Sabel when they claim that "social conflicts of the most apparently unrelated kinds determine the course of technological development" at the moment of an industrial divide. But even if they do not seem to grasp the full ambivalence of the ideal type they describe, nonetheless it is primarily Boltanski and Chiapello's analytical division of the resistance movements of the sixties into the two strands of artistic and social critique that allows us to understand how the specific aesthetic dispositions and organizational structures of the flexible personality began to crystallize from the mid-1980s onward, to complete capitalism's recuperation of—and from—the democratic turmoil of the 1960s.

Beneath A New Dominion

If I insist on the social form assumed by computers and telecommunications during the redeployment of capital after the recession of the 1970s, it is because of the central role that these

technologies, and their diverse uses, have played in the emergence of the global informational economy of today. Describing the most advanced state of this economy, Manuel Castells writes that "the products of the new information technology industries are information processing devices or information processing itself."[30] Thus he indicates the way that cultural expressions, recoded and processed as multimedia, can enter the value-adding loop of digitized communications. Indeed, he believes they must enter it: "All other messages are reduced to individual imagination or to increasingly marginalized face-to-face subcultures."[31] But Castells tends to see the conditions of entry as fundamentally technical, without developing the notion that technology itself can be shaped by patterns of social, political and cultural relations. He conceives subjective and collective agency in terms of a primary choice or rejection of the network, followed by more or less viable paths within or outside the dominant system. The network itself is not a form, but a destiny. Any systemic change is out of the question.

A critical approach can instead view computers and telecommunications as specific, pliable configurations within the larger frame of what Michel Foucault calls "governmental technologies." Foucault defines the governmental technologies (or more generally, "governmentality") as "the entire set of practices used to constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals, in their freedom, can have towards each other."[32] At stake here is the definition of a level of constraint, extending beyond what Foucault conceives as freedom—the open field of power relations between individuals, where each one tries to "conduct the conduct of others," through strategies that are always reversible—but not yet reaching the level of domination, where the relations of power are totally immobilized, for example

through physical constraint. The governmental technologies exist just beneath this level of domination: they are subtler forms of collective channeling, appropriate for the government of democratic societies where individuals enjoy substantial freedoms and tend to reject any obvious imposition of authority.

It is clear that the crisis of "ungovernability" decried by Huntington, Thatcher and other neoconservatives in the mid-1970s could only find its "resolution" with the introduction of new governmental technologies, determining new patterns of social relations; and it has become rather urgent to see exactly how these relational technologies function. To begin quite literally with the hardware, we could consider the extraordinary increase in surveillance practices since the introduction of telematics. It has become commonplace at any threshold—border, cash register, subway turnstile, hospital desk, credit application, commercial website—to have one's personal identifiers (or even body parts: finger or hand prints, retina patterns, DNA) checked against records in a distant database, to determine if passage will be granted. This appears as direct, sometimes even authoritarian control. But as David Lyon observes, "each expansion of surveillance occurs with a rationale that, like as not, will be accepted by those whose data or personal information is handled by the system."[33] The most persuasive rationales are increased security (from theft or attack) and risk management by various types of insurers, who demand personal data to establish contracts. These and other arguments lead to the internalization of surveillance imperatives, whereby people actively supply their data to distant watchers. But this example of voluntary compliance with surveillance procedures is only the tip of the control iceberg. The more potent and politically immobilizing forms of self-control emerge in the individual's relation to the labor market—

particularly when the labor in question involves the processing of cultural information.

Salaried labor, whether performed on site or at distant, telematically connected locations, can obviously be monitored for compliance to the rules (surveillance cameras, telephone checks, keystroke counters, radio-emitting badges, etc.). The offer of freelance labor, on the other hand, can simply be refused if any irregularity appears, either in the product or the conditions of delivery. Internalized self-monitoring becomes a vital necessity for the freelancer. Cultural producers are hardly an exception, to the extent that they offer their inner selves for sale: at all but the highest levels of artistic expression, subtle forms of self-censorship become the rule, at least in relation to a primary market.[34] But deeper and perhaps more insidious effects arise from the inscription of cultural, artistic and ethical ideals, once valued for their permanence, into the swiftly changing cycles of capitalist valorization and obsolescence. Among the data processors of the cultural economy—including the myriad personnel categories of media production, design and live performance, and also extending through various forms of service provision, counseling, therapy, education and so on—a depoliticizing cynicism is more widespread than self-censorship. It is described by Paolo Virno:

"At the base of contemporary cynicism is the fact that men and women learn by experiencing rules rather than "facts"... Learning the rules, however, also means recognizing their unfoundedness and conventionality. We are no longer inserted into a single, predefined "game" in which we participate with true conviction. We now face several different "games," each devoid of all obviousness and seriousness, only the site of an immediate self-affirmation—an affirmation that is much more brutal and arrogant, much more cynical, the more we employ, with no illusions but

with perfect momentary adherence, those very rules whose conventionality and mutability we have perceived."[35]

In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard identified language games as an emerging arena of value-production in capitalist societies offering computerized access to knowledge, where what mattered was not primary research but transformatory "moves" within an arbitrary semantic field.[36] With this linguistic turn of the economy, the unpredictable semiotic transformations of Mallarmé's "roll of the dice" became a competitive social gamble, as in stock markets beset by insider trading, where chance is another name for ignorance of precisely who is manipulating the rules. Here, cynicism is both the cause and prerequisite of the player's unbounded opportunism. As Virno notes: "The opportunist confronts a flux of interchangeable possibilities, keeping open as many as possible, turning to the closest and swerving unpredictably from one to the other." He continues: "The computer, for example, rather than a means to a univocal end, is a premise for successive 'opportunistic' elaborations of work. Opportunism is valued as an indispensable resource whenever the concrete labor process is pervaded by diffuse 'communicative action'... computational chatter demands 'people of opportunity,' ready and waiting for every chance."[37] Of course, the true opportunist consents to a fresh advantage within any new language game, even if it is political. Politics collapses into the flexibility and rapid turnover times of market relations. And this is the meaning of Virno's ironic reference to Habermas's theory of communicative action. In his analysis of democracy's legitimation crisis, Habermas observed that consent in democratic societies ultimately rests on each citizen's belief that in cases of doubt he could be convinced by a detailed argument: "Only if motivations for actions no longer operated through norms requiring justification, and if personality systems no longer had to find their

unity in identity-securing interpretive systems, could the acceptance of decisions without reasons become routine, that is, could the readiness to conform absolutely be produced to any desired degree."[38] What was social science fiction for Habermas in 1973 became a reality for Virno in the early 1990s: personality systems without any aspiration to subjective truth, without any need for secure processes of collective interpretation. And worse, this reality was constructed on distorted forms of the call by the radical Italian left for an autonomous status of labor.

The point becomes clear: to describe the immaterial laborer, "prosumer," or networker as a flexible personality is to describe a new form of alienation, not alienation from the vital energy and roving desire that were exalted in the 1960s, but instead, alienation from political society, which in the democratic sense is not a profitable affair and cannot be endlessly recycled into the production of images and emotions. The configuration of the flexible personality is a new form of social control, in which culture has an important role to play. It is a distorted form of the artistic revolt against authoritarianism and standardization: a set of practices and techniques for "constituting, defining, organizing and instrumentalizing" the revolutionary energies which emerged in the Western societies in the 1960s, and which for a time seemed capable of transforming social relations.

This notion of the flexible personality, that is, of subjectivity as it is modeled and channeled by contemporary capitalism, can be sharpened and deepened by looking outside of France and beyond the aspirant managerial class, to the destiny of another group of proto-revolutionary social actors, the racialized lumpen proletariat in America, from which arose the powerful emancipatory forces of the Black, Chicano and American Indian movements in the sixties, followed by a host of identity-groups thereafter. Here, at one of

the points where a real threat was posed to the capitalist system, the dialectic of integration and exclusion becomes more apparent and more cruel. One the one hand, identity formations are encouraged as stylistic resources for commodified cultural production, with the effect of deflecting the issues away from social antagonism. Thus for example, the mollifying discourses of late cultural studies, with their focus on the entertainment media, could provide an excellent distraction from the kind of serious conflict that began to emerge in American universities in the early 1990s, when a movement arose to make narratives of minority emancipation such as I, Rigoberta Menchú a part of the so-called "literary canon." Using the enormous resources concentrated by the major commercial media – television, cinema, pop music – regional cultures and subcultures are sampled, recoded into product form, and fed back to their original creators via the immeasurably wider and more profitable world market.[39]

Local differences of reception are seized upon everywhere as proof of the open, universal nature of global products. Corporate and governmental hierarchies are also made open to significant numbers of non-white subjects, whenever they are willing to play the management game. This is an essential requirement for the legitimacy of transnational governance. But wherever an identity formation becomes problematic and seems likely to threaten the urban, regional, or geopolitical balance—I'm thinking particularly of the Arab world, but also of the Balkans—then what Boris Buden calls the "cultural touch" operates quite differently and casts ethnic identity not as commercial gold, but as the signifier of a regressive, "tribal" authoritarianism, which can legitimately be repressed. Here the book *Empire* contains an essential lesson: that not the avoidance, but instead the stimulation and management of local conflicts is the keystone of transnational governance.[40] In

fact the United States themselves are already governed that way, in a state of permanent low-intensity civil war. Manageable, arms-consuming ethnic conflicts are perfect grist for the mill of capitalist empire. And the reality of terrorism offers the perfect opportunity to accentuate surveillance functions—with full consent from the majority of the citizenry.

With these last considerations we have obviously changed scales, shifting from the psychosocial to the geopolitical. But to make the ideal type work correctly, one should never forget the hardened political and economic frames within which the flexible personality evolves. Piore and Sabel point out that what they call "flexible specialization" was only one side of the response that emerged to the regulation crisis and recession of the 1970s. The other strategy is global. It "aims at extending the mass-production model. It does so by linking the production facilities and markets of the advanced countries with the fastest-growing third-world countries. This response amounts to the use of the corporation (now a multinational entity) to stabilize markets in a world where the forms of cooperation among states can no longer do the job."[41] In effect, the transnational corporation, piloted by the financial markets, and backed up by the military power and legal architecture of the G-7 states, has taken over the economic governance of the world from the former colonial-imperialist structures. It has installed, not the "multinational Keynesianism" that Piore and Sabel considered possible—an arrangement which would have entailed regulatory mechanisms to ensure consumer demand throughout the world—but instead, a system of predatory investment, calculated for maximum shareholder return, where macro-economic regulation functions only to insure minimal inflation, tariff-free exchange, and low labor costs. The "military-industrial complex," decried as the fountainhead of power in the

days of the authoritarian personality, has been superseded by what is now being called the "Wall Street-Treasury complex"—"a power elite a la C. Wright Mills, a definite networking of like-minded luminaries among the institutions—Wall Street, the Treasury Department, the State Department, the IMF, and the World Bank most prominent among them."[42]

What kind of labor regime is produced by this transnational networking among the power elite? On June 13, 2001, one could read in the newspaper that a sharp drop in computer sales had triggered layoffs of 10% of Compaq's world-wide workforce, and 5% of Hewlet Packard's—7,000 and 4,700 jobs respectively. In this situation, the highly mobile Dell corporation was poised to draw a competitive advantage from its versatile workforce: "Robots are just not flexible enough, whereas each computer is unique," explained the president of Dell Europe.[43] With its just-in-time production process, Dell can immediately pass along the drop in component prices to consumers, because it has no old product lying around in warehouses; at the same time, it is under no obligation to pay idle hands for regular 8-hour shifts when there is no work. Thus it has already grabbed the number-1 position from Compaq and it is hungry for more. "It's going to be like Bosnia," gloated an upper manager. "Taking such market shares is the chance of a lifetime."

This kind of ruthless pleasure, against a background of exploitation and exclusion, has become entirely typical—an example of the opportunism and cynicism that the flexible personality tolerates.[44] But was this what we really expected from the critique of authority in the 1960s?

Conclusions

Posing as a WTO representative, a provocateur from the group known as the Yes Men recently accepted an invitation to speak at the "Textiles of the Future" conference in Tampere, Finland. Taking both an historical and a futuristic view, Hank Hardy Unruh explained how an unpleasant event like the U.S. Civil War need never have happened: market laws ensure that cotton-picking slaves in the South would eventually have been freed. Feeding, clothing, housing and policing a slave in a country like Finland would be absurdly expensive today, he argued, compared to wages in a country like Gabon, where the costs of food, clothes and lodging are minimal, and even better, the price of policing is nil, since the workers are free. But he cautioned that the use of a remote workforce had already been tried in countries like India: and the screen of his PowerPoint presentation showed footage of rioters protesting British rule. To keep a Ghandi-like situation of workers' revolt, hand-spun cotton and local self-sufficiency from ever developing again in our time, he said, the WTO had a textile solution.

It was at this point that an assistant appeared before the crowd and ripped off Mr. Unruh's standard business attire to reveal a glittering, golden, skin-tight body suit, equipped with a yard-long inflatable phallus suddenly springing up from the groin area and seeming to dance about with a life of its own. Animated graphics on the PowerPoint screen showed a similarly outfitted man cavorting on a tropical beach: the Management Leisure Suit, Unruh explained, was conceived to transmit pleasing information through implanted body-chips when things were going well in the distant factory. But the end of the protuberance housed a television monitor, with a telematic control panel allowing the manager to intervene whenever unpleasant information signaled trouble in the making: "This is the Employee Visualization Appendage, an

instantly deployable hip-mounted device with hands-free operation, which allows the manager to see his employees directly, as well as receive all relevant data about them," Unruh continued, [45] while the audience clapped and whistled.

With this absurd parody, the Yes Men, archetypal figures of our society's capacity for consent, seem to have captured every detail of the modern control and consumption regime. Could one possibly imagine a better image of the style-conscious, tech-savvy, nomadic and hedonistic modern manager, connected directly into flows of information, able and compelled to respond to any fluctuation, but enjoying his life at the same time—profiting lavishly from his stock options, always up in the air between vocation and vacation, with unlimited pleasure and technological control right at his fingertips? True to its ethics of toleration, the corporate audience loved the textiles, the technologies, and the joke as well, at least until the entire conference was ridiculed in the press the next day. Did they even wince as images of the distant workers—fifteen-year-old Asian women on a factory floor, kids squatting at lathes—flashed up rapidly on the PowerPoint screen?

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The flexible personality represents a contemporary form of governmentality, an internalized and culturalized pattern of "soft" coercion, which nonetheless can be directly correlated to the hard data of labor conditions, bureaucratic and police practices, border regimes and military interventions. Now that the typical characteristics of this mentality—and indeed of this "culture-ideology"[46]—have come fully into view, it is high time that we intervene, as intellectuals and citizens. The study of coercive patterns, contributing to the deliberately exaggerated figure of an ideal type, is one way that academic knowledge production can

contribute to the rising wave of democratic dissent. In particular, the treatment of "immaterial" or "aesthetic" production stands to gain from this renewal of a radically negative critique. Those who admire the Frankfurt School, or, closer to us, the work of Michel Foucault, can hardly refuse the challenge of bringing their analyses up to date, at a time when the new system and style of domination has taken on crystal clear outlines.

Yet it is obvious that the mere description of a system of domination, however precise and scientifically accurate, will never suffice to dispel it. And the model of governmentality, with all its nuances, easily lends itself to infinite introspection, which would be better avoided. The timeliness of critical theory has to do with the possibility of refusing a highly articulated and effective ideology, which has integrated and neutralized a certain number of formerly alternative proposals. But it is important to avoid the trap into which the Frankfurt School, in particular, seems to have fallen: the impasse of a critique so totalizing that it leaves no way out, except through an excessively sophisticated, contemplative, and ultimately elitist aesthetics. Critique today must remain a fully public practice, engaged in communicative action and indeed, communicative activism: the re-creation of an oppositional culture, in forms specifically conceived to resist the inevitable attempts at co-optation.[47] The figure of the flexible personality can be publicly ridiculed, satirized, its supporting institutions can be attacked on political and economic grounds, its traits can be exposed in cultural and artistic productions, its description and the search for alternatives to its reign can be conceived not as another academic industry—and another potential locus of immaterial productivism—but instead as a chance to help create new forms of intellectual solidarity, a collective project for a better society. When it is carried out in a perspective of social transformation, the

exercise of negative critique itself can have a powerful subjectivizing force, it can become a way to shape oneself through the demands of a shared endeavor.[48]

The flexible personality is not a destiny. And despite the ideologies of resignation, despite the dense realities of governmental structures in our control societies, nothing prevents the sophisticated forms of critical knowledge, elaborated in the peculiar temporality of the university, from connecting directly with the new and also complex, highly sophisticated forms of dissent appearing on the streets. In the process, "artistic critique" can again rejoin the refusal of exploitation. This type of crossover is exactly what we have seen in the wide range of movements opposing the agenda of neoliberal globalization.[49] The development of an oppositional "school" can now extend to a vastly wider field. The communicational infrastructure has been partially externalized into personal computers, and a considerable "knowledge capital" has shifted from the schools and universities of the welfare state into the bodies and minds of immaterial laborers: these assets can be appropriated by all those willing to simply use what is already ours, and to take the risks of political autonomy and democratic dissent. The history of radically democratic movements can be explored and deepened, while the goals and processes of the present movement are made explicit and brought openly into debate.

The program is ambitious. But the alternative, if you prefer, is just to go on playing someone else's game—always in the air, between vocation and vacation, eyes on the latest information, fingers on the controls. Rolling the loaded dice, again and again.

[1] The World Social Forum, held for the first time in Porto Alegre in January 2001, is symbolic of the turn away from neoclassical or "supply-side" economics. Another potent symbol can be found in the charges leveled by economist Joseph Stiglitz at his former employers, the World Bank, and even more importantly, at the IMF—the major transnational organ of the neoclassical doctrine.

[2] For a short history of cultural studies as a popular-education movement, then a more theoretical treatment of its origins and potentials, see Raymond Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies" and "The Uses of Cultural Theory," both in *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989).

[3] See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, et al., *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Routledge 1993, 1st edition 1975), esp. the "theoretical overview" of the volume, pp. 9-74.

[4] The reversal becomes obvious with L. Grossberg et. al., eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), an anthology that marks the large-scale exportation of cultural studies to the American academic market.

[5] The methodological device of the ideal type was developed by Max Weber, particularly in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; as we shall see, it was taken up as a polemical figure by the Frankfurt School in the 1950s.

[6] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996/1st ed. 1973), p. 116.

[7] Herbert Marcuse, "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," in A. Arato and E. Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential*

Frankfurt School Reader (New York: Continuum, 1988), pp. 143, 158.

[8] The term "state capitalism" is more familiar as an indictment of false or failed communism of the Stalinist Soviet Union, for instance in Tony Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia* (London: Pluto Press, 1974); however, the concept as developed by the Frankfurt School applied, with variations, to all the centrally planned economies that emerged after the Great Depression.

[9] Friedrich Pollock, "State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations" (1941), in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, op. cit., p. 78.

[10] Otto Kirchheimer, "Changes in the Structure of Political Compromise" (1941), in ibid., p. 70.

[11] T.W. Adorno et. al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

[12] T.W. Adorno, "Commitment" (1962), in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, op. cit. p. 303.

[13] Ibid., p. 304.

[14] M. Crozier, S. Huntington, J. Watanabi, *The Crisis of Democracy* (Trilateral Commission, 1975), p. 74.

[15] In the words of the Parisian enragés: "What are the essential features of council power? Dissolution of all external power—Direct and total democracy—Practical unification of decision and execution—Delegates who can be revoked at any moment by those who have mandated them—Abolition of hierarchy and independent specializations—Conscious management and

transformation of all the conditions of liberated life—Permanent creative mass participation—Internationalist extension and coordination. The present requirements are nothing less than this. Self-management is nothing less." From a May 30, 1968 communiqué, signed ENRAGÉS-SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE, COUNCIL FOR MAINTAINING THE OCCUPATIONS, made available over the Internet by Ken Knabb at: www.slip.net.

[16] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975/1st German edition 1973), p. 36.

[17] *The Crisis of Democracy*, op. cit., p. 113.

[18] The origins of the "conservative revolution" are described by Keith Dixon in an excellent book, *Les évangélistes du marché* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 1998).

[19] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 8.

[20] Thomas Frank, ibid., p. 229; the references to Harvey are on pp. 25 and 233.

[21] Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 4.

[22] The research inspired by the industrial innovations of Northern Italy is pervaded by culturalist or "institutional" theories, holding that forms of economic organization grow out of all-embracing social structures, often defined by reference to a premodern tradition. Such a reference is mystifying. As Antonio Negri writes: "It is not the memory of former types of work that leads the overexploited laborers of massive Taylorist industries first

to double employment, then to black-market labor, then to decentralized work and entrepreneurial initiative, but instead the struggle against the pace imposed by the boss in the factory, and the struggle against the union... It is only on the basis of the 'refusal of work' as the motive force in this flight from the factory that one can understand certain characteristics initially taken on by decentralized labor." M. Lazarrato, Y. Moulier-Boutang, A. Negri, G. Santilli, *Des entreprises pas comme les autres: Benetton en Italie et Le Sentier à Paris* (Publisud, 1993), p. 46.

[23] Piore and Sabel did, of course, grasp the importance of programmable manufacturing tools in flexible production (cf. *The Second Industrial Divide*, op. cit., pp. 261-263). More generally, they remark that "the fascination of the computer—as documented in the ethographic studies—is that the user can adapt it to his or her own purposes and habits of thought" (ibid., p. 261); but they did not predict just how far this would go, i.e. how much of the new economy could be based on such a fascination.

[24] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); for what follows, cf. esp. pp. 208-85. The authors use Weberian methodology to propose a new ideal type of capitalist entrepreneur, "connectionist man." They do not systematically relate this ideal type to a new sociopolitical order and mode of production/consumption, nor do they grasp the full ambivalence determined by the origins of the flexible type in the period around 1968; but they provide an excellent description of the ideology that has emerged to neutralize that ambivalence.

[25] Andrea Branzi, one of the North Italian designers who led and theorized this transition, distinguishes between the "Homogeneous Metropolis" of mass-produced industrial design, and what he calls "the Hybrid Metropolis, born of the crisis of classical modernity

and of rationalism, which discovers niche markets, the robotization of the production line, the diversified series, and the ethnic and cultural minorities." "The Poetics of Balance: Interview with Andrea Branzi," in F. Burkhardt and C. Morozzi, Andrea Branzi (Paris: Editions Dis-Voir, undated), p. 45.

[26] In *L'individu incertain* (Paris: Hachette, 1999, 1st ed. 1995), sociologist Alain Ehrenberg describes the postwar regime of consumption as being "characterized by a passive spectator fascinated by the [television] screen, with a dominant critique marked by the model of alienation." He then links the positive connotations of the computer terminal in our own day to "a model of communication promoting inter-individual exchanges modeled on themes of activity and relationships, with self-realization as the dominant stereotype of consumption" (p. 240). Note the disappearance of critique in the second model.

[27] The phrase "selective tradition" is from the essay "When was Modernism?" in Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, op. cit.; this text and the one that follows constitute what is perhaps William's deepest meditation on capitalist alienation in the historical development of aesthetic forms.

[28] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 141-48.

[29] In the text "Immaterial Labor," Maurizio Lazarrato proposes the notion of aesthetic production: "It is more useful, in attempting to grasp the process of the formation of social communication and its subsumption within the 'economic,' to use, rather than the 'material' model of production, the 'aesthetic' model that involves author, reproduction, and reception.... The 'author' must lose its individual dimension and be transformed into

an industrially organized production process (with a division of labor, investments, orders, and so forth), 'reproduction' becomes a mass reproduction organized according to the imperatives of profitability, and the audience ('reception') tends to become the consumer/communicator." *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 144. The computer is the key instrument allowing for this industrial organization of the author function, in constant feedback relations with the communicating public.

[30] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (London: Blackwell, 1996), p. 67.

[31] Manuel Castells, ibid., p. 374.

[32] Michel Foucault, "L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté," interview with H. Becker, R. Forner-Betancourt, A. Gomez-Mueller, in *Dits et ecrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. IV, p. 728; also see the excellent article by Maurizio Lazarrato, "Du biopouvoir à la biopolitique," in Multitudes 1, pp. 45-57. (for english version see: http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics.htm)

[33] David Lyon, *Surveillance Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), p. 44.

[34] For an analysis of the ways that (self-) censorship operates in contemporary cultural production, see A. Corsani, M. Lazzarato, A. Negri, *Le Bassin du travail immateriel (BTI) dans le métropole parisien* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), pp. 71-78.

[35] Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," in *Radical Thought in Italy*, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

[36] Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), esp. pp. 13-14 et 31-33.

[37] Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," op. cit., p. 17. Compare Sennet's discussion of a 1991 U.S. government report on the skills people need in a flexible economy: "in flexible forms of work, the players make up the rules as they go along... past performance is no guide to present rewards; in each office 'game' you start over from the beginning." Richard Sennet, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 110.

[38] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, op. cit., p. 44.

[39] Can research work in cultural studies, such as Dick Hebdige's classic *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, now be directly instrumentalized by marketing specialists? As much is suggested in the book *Commodify Your Dissent*, eds. Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 73-77, where Frank and Dave Mulcahey present a fictional "buy recommendation" for would-be stock-market investors: "Consolidated Deviance, Inc. ('ConDev') is unarguably the nation's leader, if not the sole force, in the fabrication, consultancy, licensing and merchandising of deviant subcultural practice. With its string of highly successful 'SubCults™,' mass-marketed youth culture campaigns highlighting rapid stylistic turnover and heavy cross-media accessorization, ConDev has brought the allure of the marginalized to the consuming public."

[40] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 198-201: "The triple imperative of the Empire is incorporate, differentiate, manage."

[41] Piore and Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide*, op. cit., pp. 16-17; cf. the section on "Multinational Keynesianism, pp. 252-57.

[42] Jagdish Bhagwati, "The Capital Myth," *Foreign Affairs* May/June 1998; electronic text available at www.asiamedia.ucla.edu.

[43] "Une crise sans precedent ebranle l'informatique mondiale," Le Monde, June 13, 2001, p. 18.

[44] The ultimate reason for this tolerance appears to be fear. In *Souffrance en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), the labor psychologist Christophe Dejours studies the "banalization of evil" in contemporary management. Beyond the cases of perverse or paranoid sadism, concentrated at the top, he identifies the imperative to display courage and virility as the primary moral justification for doing the "dirty work" (selection for lay-offs, enforcement of productivity demands, etc.). "The collective strategy of defense entails a denial of the suffering occasioned by the 'nasty jobs'.... The ideology of economic rationalism consists... —beyond the exhibition of virility—in making cynicism pass for force of character, for determination and an elevated sense of collective responsibilities... in any case, for a sense of supra-individual interests" (pp. 109-111). Underlying the defense mechanisms, Dejours finds both fear of personal responsibility and fear of becoming a victim oneself; cf. pp. 89-118.

[45] The story of the Yes Men is told by RtMark, Corporate Consulting for the 21st Century, at www.rtmark.com; or go directly to www.theyesmen.org.

[46] The notion that contemporary transnational capitalism legitimates itself and renders itself desirable through a "culture-

ideology" is developed by Leslie Sklair, in *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (London: Blackwell, 2001).

[47] Hence the paradoxical, yet essential refusal to conceive oppositional political practice as the constitution of a party, and indeed of a unified social class, for the seizure of state power. Among the better formulations of this paradox is Miguel Benasayag and Diego Sztulwark, *Du contre-pouvoir* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2000). It is no coincidence that the book also deals with the possibility of transforming the modes of knowledge production: "The difference lies less in belonging or not to a state structure like the university, than in the articulation with alternative dynamics that coproduce, rework and distribute the forms of knowledge. That must be done in sites of 'minority' (i.e. 'non-hegemonic') counter-power, which can gradually participate in the creation of a powerful and vibrant bloc of counter-power" (p. 113).

[48] The notion of a new emulation, on an ethical basis, between free and independent subjects seems a far more promising future for the social tie than any restoration of traditional authority. Richard Sennet doesn't hide a certain nostalgia for the latter in *The Corrosion of Character*, op. cit., pp. 115-16; but he remarks, far more interestingly, that in "the process view of community... reflected in current political studies of deliberative democracy... the evolving expression of disagreement is taken to bind people more than the sheer declaration of 'correct' principles" (pp. 143-44).

[49] For a glimpse into the way intellectuals, activists, workers, and artists can cooperate in dissenting actions, see Susan George, "Fixing or nixing the WTO," in Le Monde diplomatique, January 2000, available at www.en.monde-diplomatique.fr/2000/01/07george.