

# A Critique of Work: Between Ecology and Socialism

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Françoise Gollain

# A Critique of Work: Between Ecology and Socialism

(Partially translated by Chris Turner)

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International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7388 2117

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7388 2826

Email: [info@iied.org](mailto:info@iied.org)

Website: [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

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This publication is dedicated to the memory of Ivan Illich (1926-2002), whose thought continues to inspire.



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# Foreword

This critical essay identifies important structural changes needed for the institutionalisation of democratic participation and sustainable development. Participation in civic affairs and decision-making largely depends on transformations that allow people to reclaim control over time, space and resources. More specifically, there is a need for economic arrangements that offer enough *material security* and *time* for citizens (both men and women) to exercise their right to participate in shaping policies for the public good and ecological sustainability. Only with some material security and time can people be 'empowered' both to think about what type of policies they would like to see and to engage in deliberative forms of democratic decision-making. From this perspective, the author of this invited paper puts forward a number of suggestions for the provision of material security and liberated time that might be valid for different regions of the globe.

Drawing extensively on French, German and Italian debates on the future of wage work, the author of this essay argues for the construction of a new modernity in which the centrality of wage work would be greatly diminished. Civilising globalisation implies not only a re-localisation of the economy but also the fostering of a variety of social bonds outside the market and alternative social practices that simultaneously diminish the importance of the wage relationship and create new production and consumption models. The best strategy for moving beyond the wage-based society lies in a synergy between three mutually reinforcing measures:

- A reduction of time spent in wage work and more equitable sharing of jobs. This is about finding ways to (a) change the sexual division of labour so that men do as much unpaid work as women and engage in caring activities within the domestic/reproductive sphere, (b) ensure that wage work is more evenly distributed so that everyone can invest in other activities *outside the wage economy*, (c) defend the rights associated with wage work, and (d) move towards a post-wage society and introduce new rights de-linked from wage work. An important goal here is to free up people's time for self-chosen and autonomous activities, whilst ensuring freedom from economic necessity.

- The re-localisation of plural economies that combine both subsistence and market-oriented activities. The environments where people live will need to offer more individual and collective opportunities to engage in many different activities outside – and unmediated by – the market, wage work and commodity production.
- A guaranteed and unconditional minimum citizen income for all. A Citizen Income is based on the notion that the productive capacity of society is the result of all the scientific and technical knowledge accumulated by previous generations. This productive capacity is also the result of the continuous creation of social life and human assets through communicative competence, behavioral skills and other forms of human creativity expressed in everyday life throughout society. This is a common heritage of humankind and all individuals regardless of origin, age or gender have a right to benefit from it, in the form of an unconditional and adequate basic income. An equitable distribution of the existing world product would allow each person on earth to benefit from such a guaranteed income. Apart from offering a measure of security, a Citizen Income would allow people – men and women – to find more time to engage in caring activities, civic affairs and democratic decision-making over the means and ends of social life.

The author thus identifies an important set of enabling conditions for more widespread equity and democratic participation in society. But the publication of this volume is timely because it also invites us to re-think some of the key assumptions embedded in mainstream policy and practice. Debates on environment and development in particular need to be much more informed by an understanding of the implications of the changing nature of wage work in the twenty-first century. Work is after all a key site of interaction between society and nature.

In the industrialised North – and increasingly in the developing South – wage work is seen as the dominant organising principle of people's lives and the social body as a whole. And most international and national social, economic and environmental policies envision fewer and fewer people directly dependent on land, forests, water and other natural resources for their livelihoods and culture. Encouraging people to move out of the primary sector and get jobs in the largely urban-based manufacturing and service sectors is seen as both desirable and necessary – regardless of the social and ecological costs involved. This view of progress assumes that history can repeat itself throughout the world. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a direct relationship between the vast increases in productivity achieved through the use of automated technology, re-engineering, downsizing and total quality management and the permanent exclusion of high numbers of workers from

employment, both in industry and the service sector. This erosion of the link between job creation and wealth creation calls for a more equitable distribution of productivity gains through a reduction of working hours, and for alternative development models that provide opportunities and spaces for the generation of use values rather than exchange values.

Much of today's literature on mainstreaming people-centered processes and participation in environment and development tends to be reformist. Changes in policies, practices and procedures must somehow fit within the wider social and economic dynamics that reproduce inequitable relationships between men and women (and other axes of difference). The boundaries around 'what is possible and desirable' are usually narrowly circumscribed, leaving the *status quo* largely unchallenged and intact. By highlighting the changing nature of work and showing how wage work is a relatively recent modern invention – rather than a natural human condition – this book opens up wider possibilities for transformative thinking and action. For example, many of the arguments presented here invite a creative re-visioning of both the processes and end points of organisational change and professional re-orientation for people-centered development and participation. Imposing limits to state or corporate monopoly control over goods and services and a *de facto* de-professionalisation of social life become possible by regenerating autonomous<sup>i</sup> spaces for reflection, deliberation and action *by, with* and *for* citizens in different social and ecological contexts. More generally, the cultural shifts argued for here resonate with visions of the future based on diversity, decentralisation, democratisation, dynamic local adaptation and the existential autonomy of individuals. According to the author, meaning, identity and a livable world can and should be sought outside the global market and the new 'knowledge economy'.

Grounded in history and empirically based, this invited paper is clearly utopian in its orientation. As such it represents a most pertinent form of social critique, offering a counter-image of an alternative society in which participatory democracy, diverse cultures, plural definitions of well being, and ecological sustainability are nurtured. May the ideas presented in this publication enrich and strengthen people's participation in the search for a sustainable and just world.

Michel Pimbert

<sup>i</sup> Autonomy (self determination and citizen control over tools and means of living) is used here in the sense Ivan Illich defined it – and in opposition to the concept of heteronomy. The paralysis of autonomous capacities by the overdevelopment of heteronomous systems means that the active citizen is reduced to a worker-consumer dependent on the delivery of professional services and commodities. See Ivan Illich (1973) *Tools for Conviviality*, Marion Boyars, London.



## Author's Preface

This book was originally published four years ago in French. Four years on, I wanted to update it to reflect not only the shifts that have occurred in the French debates over the future of work and in the wider social–political context, but also my own progress in this exploration. When I was invited to make my reflections on the transformation of work available to an English-speaking readership by an organisation whose focus is firmly global (the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development), I welcomed the opportunity to break with my narrowly French – or at most European – centred outlook. I had intuitively felt that a shift in scope was needed.

Since the original publication, it has also become clear to me that some of the most interesting social alternatives and new spaces for thought outside the stifling grip of neo-liberal ideology coincide with the rise of diverse and promising networks of resistance to capitalist globalisation. However, the present update stems from a concern that, apart from those sections arguing for the setting up of a guaranteed income, the majority of the anti-globalisation movement does not yet appear to have fully taken on board the issue of work and, in particular, that of the compulsion to enter wage labour.

That the current British climate – unchallenged workfare policies, enterprise ideology, a professional culture of long working hours – is not the most conducive to a critical evaluation of the domination of paid work is an understatement. This climate certainly contrasts with the atmosphere of critical examination which was partly prompted by the significant increase in the level of unemployment in France a decade ago, and most notably by its sharp rise in 1992 which, for the first time, affected professionals and other qualified workers.

At the time and all through the 1990s, an awareness of the growing exclusion of workers from mainstream employment practices and an interrogation over the profound technological changes affecting the world of work gathered momentum. Both of these concerns surfaced during discussions on the nature of the 'information revolution' and on what many publications, including this volume, have termed 'the crisis of work'. This in turn evolved into a controversy around 'the end of work'. The

French version of Jeremy Rifkin's American bestseller, *The End of Work*, published in 1997, was widely debated at the time. The book put in very graphic terms the direct relationship that exists between the vast increases in productivity achieved through re-engineering, downsizing and total quality management, and the permanent exclusion of high numbers of workers from employment, both in industry and the service sector. By so doing, it crystallised the premonition about the erosion of the link between job creation and wealth creation held by many French commentators.<sup>1</sup> This played no small part in strengthening the consensus on the left, but also influenced some supporters on the right, over the need for a more equitable distribution of productivity gains through a reduction of working hours, and for the provision of alternative opportunities such as employment in the social economy or multiple activities carried out primarily for reasons other than economic ones.

But we need to go back further in order to understand the particular interest on the part of the French public for these subjects. One must remember the lasting effect of the dramatic value shift born out of the May 1968 uprising and its aftermath in maintaining a diffuse aspiration to a culture of free time in France; an aspiration epitomised in the '68 slogan '*Ne pas perdre sa vie à la gagner*' (Do not waste your life earning a living) and kept alive by a number of authors in Green and alternative circles, including of course André Gorz himself, even through the 1980s which saw a surge in legitimacy of entrepreneurship and the work ethic that it implies.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-1990s, the debates around the nature and the future of work and the explicit support for a national reduction of working hours had reached wider circles, beyond the expected intellectual chapels. Published in 1995, a reading of some of the major representations of work through the history of Western ideas by a young philosopher, Dominique Méda (1995), proved a convincing intellectual justification to the debunking of work as an essential value. The latest in a tradition of critical publications on work, it served as an essential reference and backdrop for the lively discussions of the second half of the 1990s, together with André Gorz's *Reclaiming Work* (1999).

To those who were critical of productivist ideology and its correlate, consumerism, there was no doubt that the ultimate promise of the unprecedented development of informational technologies was the freeing-up of time. I myself have reaffirmed all

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1. But, in fairness, not all. The raging controversies over whether societies with high-tech economies were experiencing 'the end of work' or not, although confusing and misleading given the wildly diverging content of the term 'work' on both sides, helped nonetheless to maintain a positive climate of examination of the role of work in society and individuals' lives.

2. The 35-hour week was one of the promises made by the Socialist party for the 1981 presidential elections which brought François Mitterrand to power. In 1982, there was a mandatory reduction of the working week from 40 to 39 hours, but it was implemented in an ill-thought-out fashion that attracted much criticism and deterred the left from considering the issue again seriously until the middle of the 1990s.

through this volume the need for a radical rethink of work in its many dimensions, and specifically the need to seize the progressive developments of the changes occurring, in order to transcend our wage-based society. It is this conviction that has led me to appreciate the visionary quality of André Gorz's claim that mass unemployment and the decline of the Fordist model<sup>3</sup> do not merely indicate an economic problem but point to a potential change in civilisation. To him, to me, and to many progressive participants in the controversies over 'the end of work' of the late 1990s, it was clear that the 'inability of our societies to establish a civilization based on free time leads to a completely absurd and scandalously unjust distribution of work, disposable time and wealth' (Gorz, 1994).

Against this background, the vitality of the French national debate over the possible shape of a reduction of working hours as well as the huge support enjoyed for the 35-hour week, implemented from 1998 by the Socialist–Communist–Green coalition that was in power,<sup>4</sup> was motivated by more than an altruistic desire to share what was perceived as an increasingly scarce good – a job; although it was that too of course. Working less to live better had simply acquired a renewed legitimacy. And it is this theme which I explore here.

I fully accept the necessarily Utopian orientation of my thinking in this book. Nevertheless, I wanted to affirm that, in order to outline a credible alternative, it is absolutely essential to reconcile a visionary position with thinking on – and management of – transition. This implies that I both set radical objectives and carry out a precise examination of the possible developments and mediations, paying attention to the fact that every break with the existing order is necessarily to be effected and lived out over time.

This twofold demand, connected to a rejection of determinisms<sup>5</sup> of any kind, is a theme running across all the fields of my exploration. Scientific ecology offers no

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3 The Fordist period, roughly 1945–75 in France, was characterised by: full employment; state intervention in the economy and collective bargaining at national level; steady productivity, wage and consumption rise; and a strong welfare state. It is also called the Fordist consensus because workers accepted hard working conditions in return for job and social security as well as an improvement in the standard of living for all. Now it has given way to a post-Fordist configuration whereby work organisation and business practices mean an increased demand for higher qualifications and a flexible workforce. It is characterised by an growing social polarisation accentuated by the weakening of welfare systems. In this book I examine at length the various social and personal implications of this major shift.

4 A compulsory national reduction had appeared in the 1997 Socialist party election manifesto. I should note though that voluntary reductions of the working week had been encouraged and tried in different forms by enlightened company directors before the rise to power of the Socialists–Communist–Green coalition in 1997.

5 Determinism or a deterministic view of history implies that all events are narrowly determined by preceding events or natural laws. It legitimises historical predictions about the next stages and even the final outcome of historical development but precludes free will on the part of individuals or groups. Versions of this within both the Marxist and the liberal traditions have asserted that the laws of capitalist development are known. For the latter, dominant today, the present form of globalisation simply follows the normal course of economic development and it is therefore pointless to question it.

ultimate yardstick for the orientation of industrial society. Technological developments do not allow us to predict with certainty either the onset of barbarism or the fulfilment of potentials for freedom. In a situation of scientific uncertainty, in which history has no intrinsic direction or meaning, the only way open to us is that of democratic debate informed by a knowledge of the present, combined with profoundly innovative demands.



# Introduction

This study is devoted to critical thinking on work as the dominant organising principle of our lives and of society as a whole. Historically, work was the chief means by which nature was conquered and humanity's destiny fulfilled; it provided the promise of plenty, even the hope of human liberation and the basis for a new society. All these directive Utopias are today turning into nightmares. Ecological equilibria are deteriorating to an unprecedented degree and new forms of scarcity are being produced in various fields (including a scarcity of time). But we are also seeing a generalisation of insecurity and, increasingly, a personalisation of subordination within the new forms of work, a decaying of the social bond and, lastly, the commoditisation of increasing swathes of our everyday lives and of our natural and cultural environment.

In this study I explore work from a political ecology perspective. Such an approach is ideal because it offers an overall conceptual framework for addressing problems that is commensurate with their seriousness.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, 'The conceptual framework of a critical ecology', I reflect on work within the framework of political ecology. I introduce some of Ivan Illich's thinking, especially how political ecology aims to preserve individuals' and groups' capacity for self-determination. This is a key theme in the book – how to protect everyday culture and people's lives from the extension of market logic and the power of technocracy. And how to give people back control (autonomy) in a work climate which is increasingly robbing them of such individual self-determination (imposing heteronomy). Taking my lead from the work of André Gorz, I argue that a thorough critique of wage labour must be rooted in a defence of the existential autonomy of individuals.

Having set the scene, in the second part, 'Changes to work', I analyse the recent changes in working practices. I emphasise that work is an invention of capitalism rather than a natural human condition. Thinking of it in these terms opens the possibility of moving beyond it. I criticise the arguments that increasing subjective investment in work and its communicative character in the knowledge economy produces greater autonomy for the workers. I argue that the 'new work' of the

information age is the latest manifestation of the predominance of capitalism in daily life. The demand that one literally 'give oneself' to the job reveals the essential ambiguity of recent developments, and shows the need for a reappropriation of autonomy through a comprehensive politics of time.

In the last part, 'An eco-socialist project for a globalised world', I offer an alternative scenario. In this scenario, wage labour is abolished as the dominant route to identity and material security. I argue that, in order to undermine the centrality of waged work on a global scale, we must re-appropriate time. The liberation of time is the ultimate foundation of autonomy. For it to be a true liberation, two essential conditions must be met: relieve the individual of the daily anxiety of making a living and prevent the overtaking of ever-increasing parts of her or his existence by the profit motive. But the challenge is how to achieve this. I assess France's 35-hour week reform, which has sadly failed in its promise to share out jobs and increase free time for all, and has not fundamentally altered the distribution of wealth. Furthermore, most recent employment and welfare policies and practices point in the same direction, as they show a trend towards consolidating, or even deepening, social inequality.

Thus I propose remuneration in a form different from wages. Neither labour nor wages should remain central to the individual and society, but wealth should be shared out by the allocation of a guaranteed income to all. The universal character of this income, or social wage, is best justified by the fact that the active forces of the new forms of capital accumulation do not just lie in advanced technical knowledge, but also in the communicative competence, behavioural skills and creative abilities of the workers which are relevant in everyday life and, importantly, result from a continuous creation in social life.

I also call for a resistance to the powerful globalisation forces. In my view, civilising globalisation implies not only a re-localisation of the economy but also the fostering of a variety of social bonds outside the market, of alternative social practices in order to diminish the importance of the wage relationship and create new production and consumption models. It is ultimately about maintaining diverse cultures and a liveable world by reaching a balance between heteronomy and autonomy, as Ivan Illich made plain thirty years ago.

Different forms of guaranteed income or material security have pride of place in this strategy because they help prioritise activities which have an intrinsic value, therefore narrowing the sphere of economic value creation. I make a number of suggestions for how this might work in different regions of the globe. The best strategy for moving beyond the wage-based society lies in a synergy between three types of measure: a reduction of working hours, a guaranteed income, and the

development of alternative activities to wage labour and of practices of a composite economy. Thus we shift the emphasis from reduced working time to one of material security, with or without a job.



## PART I

# The Conceptual Framework of a Critical Ecology



# 1. Introduction: Work, an interface between society and nature

The ecological discourse on the relations between society and nature is based on the idea of finitude, or limits. *Scientific* ecology's most fundamental contribution has been to show the limits to the transformative activity of human beings. Fuelled by the contributions of that science, *political* ecology is 'the thinking that is critical of the cult of modern times, the cult of productivity, which long promised plenty, but has now turned around to exclude human beings and ravage nature' (Deléage, 1992:14). These limits thus extend beyond environmental limits to include the dominance of economic rationality in its ecological, social and cultural manifestations. Defined in this way, political ecology needs to explore work as a force for transformation, appropriation and, above all, destruction. These are central themes in this study.

In this first part I explore work as a site of interaction between nature and society. The first stage of an *ecological* critique of work is to explore man's capacity to transform nature to satisfy his needs, the level of which is always socially determined. Such a perspective is particularly wary of incitements, sometimes tinged with a barely concealed nationalism, to produce and to consume, and to make a national effort for 'job-rich growth', no matter what the jobs involve or the price to be paid in personal, social and environmental terms. This means that, from a Green standpoint, work is not valued either as the means for conquering nature, or as the fulfilment of humanity. The ecology that concerns us here is a resolutely socialist ecology, since an ecology that masked the intrinsic relation between productivism, work and the logic of profit would not be able to propose a genuinely subversive approach.<sup>6</sup>

## A brief history of work and nature

It is useful briefly to recall the constellation of factors that, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, presided over the birth of the economy and work, in the sense in which we understand them today. Historically there was an interdependence between representations of work and representations of nature: from the sixteenth century onwards, with the earliest development of capitalism, a

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6. It goes without saying that this is a socialism that is critical of the illusions of progress.

revolution occurred in the collective representations both of nature *and* of work which saw humanity's relation to nature as one of domination. This manifested itself in the massive use of natural resources, and particularly non-renewable fossil fuels.

Even though there was a rise in the esteem accorded to work during the Middle Ages, economic ideology owes the notion of the productive individual, on the one hand, to modern science and the more positive evaluation of technology, and, on the other, to the seventeenth and eighteenth century theories of contract in economics and politics.<sup>7</sup>

With Descartes and Bacon, the mission of science became oriented towards artifice: the achievement of knowledge no longer consisted merely in unveiling a truth, but in an appropriation/transformation of a disenchanting world. Work was the means of this new knowing/acting, bringing human beings an unprecedented mastery. In this view, working on nature was ultimately what conferred humanity on human beings. So, for example, *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe's novel of 1719, is a thesis on the birth and history of humanity through productive work: man becomes man thanks to his capacity to transform his natural milieu. Work established humanity by freeing it from nature.<sup>8</sup>

According to the philosopher John Locke, man, equipped with an exclusive right to his own body and to the fruits of his labours, is a producer even in the natural state, and 'The *labour* of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his' (1965). This importance now accorded to production can also clearly be seen in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, for whom the purpose of the state was to protect people, 'in such sort, as that by their owne industry, and by the fruites of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly' (1968). Exclusivity of property and exploitation of nature by way of work were, then, bound up with one another.

By reducing nature to physical movement alone, Galilean science had already made human beings and the sphere of their activities strangers to nature to the point where 'nature appears finally as the mere provider of the necessary means for the achievement of human ends: it is now merely the legally appropriable and technically exploitable backdrop to human activities. To think about nature and society in their inter-relatedness became impossible' (Bourg, 1996:22). If, in 1776, with *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith constructed a unified notion of work and effected an

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7. For a clear, succinct account of this aspect, see Dominique Bourg, *Les Scénarios de l'écologie* (1996) which I have drawn on in this section. To explain this emergence, I should also highlight other factors, such as the end of the geocentric order and of natural communities, the appearance of the individual, and the commodification of wealth. On these factors, see Dominique Méda, *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition* (1995).

8. On this point, see the interesting article by Mireille Gouaux, 'L'émergence du travail dans l'imaginaire littéraire du 18e siècle: *Robinson Crusoe*' in Paul Bouffartigue and Henri Eckert (eds), *Le Travail à l'épreuve du salariat* (1997).



extraordinary break with the intellectual context that had dominated a few years previously, he was nonetheless working within this same scientific and philosophical heritage.

The consequences of this are clear: as Dominique Bourg writes, ‘a Green-inspired social and all-embracing project cannot, in its re-evaluation of the role and impact of economic activities, fail to confront the question of work. One cannot attempt to outline something like a sustainable development, and hence a new type of production, without, at the same time, posing the problem of the place of work within our societies’ (Bourg, 1996:121).

### What can political ecology offer?

The premises of a critique of work within the perspective opened up by political ecology are as follows: Work and employment practices are undergoing a number of significant changes. The most significant and problematic one is that, thanks to organisational and technical innovations, the world economy is producing an increasing amount of wealth with a decreasing number of hours worked and paid. This would be good news if the work needed and the wealth produced were shared equally amongst citizens. We could all work less and live better. Instead, the reproduction of the capitalist system demands the preservation of a strong work ethic, increased production and material accumulation. The result is environmental degradation, mass unemployment and underemployment, social exclusion, and widening social inequality, both within countries and between North and South. This change in work taking place before our eyes therefore forces us to re-examine the productivist and consumerist model that has been ours since the advent of industrial capitalism. To think about the problem of work implies that we should remember that every economic phenomenon has three dimensions to it: an *economic*, a *socio-cultural* and a *natural*.

Political ecology can underpin the cross-disciplinary enquiry required by the complexity of the question of work. The critical political ecology of work may be, to borrow Jean-Paul Deléage’s expression, ‘the new humanism<sup>9</sup> of our time’, and may be able ‘to take up the new challenges posed by the combination of a social crisis and a historically unprecedented, planetary, ecological crisis’ (Deléage, 1993:10). As political thinking, it can play a leading role in the inter-linked debates on the relationship of our societies with nature, on the conflict between capital and labour,

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9. A philosophy which originated in the Renaissance period. It puts a central emphasis on the human realm and rejects the supernatural. Today, the term is widely used in thinking and political doctrines which prioritise the full development of human capacities and sensibilities and the respect of human rights in the face of technocratic threats or suppression by the dominance of the laws of the market.

and on the foundations of productivism, as well as on the impasses to which it leads. Historically, the human project has been two-pronged: a project for the mastery and appropriation of nature and, at the same time, a project to control man and society (Alphandéry et al., 1992:134). Work is, precisely, *at the heart* of this two-pronged project.

In this connection, the thoughts of the economist Karl Polanyi are of genuine relevance to ecological thinking on the joint exploitation of man and nature, and on the commoditisation to which the lives of individuals and all the elements of their environment are subject. The existence of a self-regulating market implies that all elements are available for sale – not just goods and services, but also work and money (wages being merely the price paid for labour power). For it is clear that, in Polanyi's view, these commodities are not real commodities: they are fictitious. Thus, he writes: 'Labour is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man' (Polanyi, 2001:75). Now, this crude fiction of the commodity, while providing the organising principle for society overall, cannot, however, be tolerated by society by virtue of the ravages it wreaks upon its very substance. Hence the urgent need to impose limits on market logic from an eco-socialist standpoint, or to 're-embed' the economic in the social.

Lastly, another form of contemporary thinking within the broad anti-economistic movement has contributed greatly to ecological thought. The critique developed in France over the last fifteen years by MAUSS (*le Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales*) makes quite a fundamental contribution to a critique of work from an eco-socialist perspective. MAUSS, which operates around the journal of the same name, has established that utilitarianism and the world-view of Western societies are, in fact, identical. The term 'utilitarian' may be applied to any discourse which states that human beings are governed by their self-interest alone, and which identifies justice with the happiness of the greatest number – that happiness resulting from the maximisation of wealth. This means that *the utilitarian philosophy is fundamentally workist and that it underlies Western societies centred around production and material accumulation*. By contrast, primitive societies were not primarily concerned with producing goods, but with maintaining their social cohesion. This is why Alain Caillé, leader of the MAUSS, can argue that anti-utilitarianism arises from the 'certainty, conscious or otherwise, that the only way of satisfying one's needs and interests is not to sacrifice one's life to working for their satisfaction... And, more generally, that humanity only becomes properly human beyond instrumentality' (Caillé, 1993:134).

## 2. Illich's humanism against the loss of meaning

Political ecology, being critical of the ideologies and practices of work, is an ecology which, *by its very principle*, presupposes *a conception of the environment, expanded beyond that of the natural environment*. In this regard it is the direct heir to the radical ecology of the 1960s. 'The absolute damage, for which there can be no compensation and which no *payment* can make good, is not the destruction of some particular element of the heritage, but the destruction of the bonds attaching man to his environment and to others', wrote Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Jean Robert twenty years ago.<sup>10</sup> What concerns the advocates of radical ecology, then, is the impoverishment of the bonds uniting human beings with the world and with others or, in other words, the degradation of the environment *and* of social relations.

The increasing degradation of relations between human beings corresponds to the progressive invasion of commodity exchange. The basic problem is that industrial, productivist society operates under the illusion that what is, by its essence, of the order of *autonomous personal action within the framework of a culture* can be achieved by a production analogous to the production of things. But it is not. The victory of heteronomy condemned by radical ecologists must, then, first be understood as *a loss of meaning because meaningful action becomes secondary in a society increasingly organised around commodity production*. This impoverishment of both human individual experience and of human culture resulting from this loss of meaning is, in fact, a powerful generator of demand for market substitutes which, as first Illich, then Dupuy and Robert conclude, do not undo the damage, but merely enable us to survive in an increasingly degraded and alienating world. Ivan Illich's humanism asserted itself from the outset *both* against this same destruction of nature *and* against the destruction of what makes man's humanity.

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10. Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Jean Robert, *La Trahison de l'opulence* (1976 :25). This work was the product of three years of research at CEREBE (Centre de recherche sur le bien-être) in Paris and at the CIDOC (Centro intercultural de documentación) at Cuernavaca in Mexico, whose director was Ivan Illich. My feeling is that this work is exemplary of the critique of industrial society that was developed in radical ecology circles following 1968. My research has shown that much current writing still refers to it. It is, among other things, structured by central concepts presented in Chapter 3 of Ivan Illich's *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis – the Expropriation of Health* (1977).

Consequently, I agree with Illich that the problem of limits relates not merely to the degradation of nature, but also to the loss of humanity's capacity for autonomy and self-determination. Thus, the critique of work in political ecology is part of a *defence of autonomy*, this being the only bulwark against the triumph of market ecology and Green technocracy, and also of bio-centrism<sup>11</sup> or other regressive options. And it must be a *real* autonomy, as opposed to the autonomy that is supposedly permitted by some new work practices.

The defence of autonomy seems to be one of the most widely shared principles among those analysing recent developments in the world of work and is synonymous with the goals of political ecology. In the following paragraph I provide a history of it by summarising how it is formulated in Ivan Illich's work.

Post-1968 radical ecologists, of which Illich was one of the eminent representatives, were concerned to show that the industrial mode of production involved a general distortion of the human environment. For these critics of industrial society it was a question of (1) identifying what we are destroying that cannot be repaired by our productive activity, and (2) revealing the alienation of individuals by the development of techno-structure or large-scale apparatuses such as centralised nuclear electricity production or technocratic systems of administration (Dupuy and Robert, 1976:29). They also identified the problems with the development and dominance of the service sector, termed 'tertiarisation of the economy',<sup>12</sup> that André Gorz has stressed since the 1980s. Some people, commented Illich, rejoice at tertiarisation because it may mean a moderation of the consumption of material goods while satisfying the demand for immaterial needs (health, culture, information, safety, good relations with others). But, in doing so, he stressed, they are merely encouraging industrial man's increased dependence on institutions. 'The substitution of an industrial product or a professional service for a useful activity in which people engage or would like to engage', which he refers to as 'radical monopoly', amounts to paralysing autonomous action in favour of 'professional deliveries' (Illich, 1996:72–3). For example, for many young people it is not conceivable that they quench their thirst with simple water, or locally or home-produced beverages, or anything other than 'a drink'; i.e. a highly packaged and processed good offered by a global brand.

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11. A biocentrist approach implies that societies' arrangements and regulations can and should be derived from the observance of the laws of nature. The autonomy of the political sphere and the role of the democratic process through which a sustainable economic, social and cultural order can be built are denied in this scenario.

12. 'Tertiary activities' together form the third, or service, sector (*secteur tertiaire*) of the economy, after the agriculture, mining and fishing sector (primary sector) and the manufacturing sector (secondary sector). 'Tertiarisation' therefore stands for the growing dominance of the new third sector of the economy at the expense of the first two.

The defence of autonomy presupposes a radical critique of industrialist and productivist values and the promotion of an alternative philosophy of the common good: 'The individual's autonomy is intolerably reduced by a society that defines the maximum satisfaction of the maximum number as the largest consumption of industrial goods' (Illich, 2001:12). Industrial society can be defined, in a word, as a prosthetic society (Dupuy, 1975:42); hence the imperative need for a radical political ecology to impose limits, not merely on environmental degradation, but also in the field of services. The crisis generated by the industrial mode of production, say Dupuy and Robert, does not so much mean that interpersonal relations are mediated by objects (they always will be), but that those relations themselves have come to be perceived and even managed like commodity exchange. These two authors look highly critically on the development of the tertiary sector: industrial man, incapable of looking after himself and forming satisfactory relationships with his fellows and his environment, turns spontaneously to institutions to *produce* – in the way Renault *produces* cars – what he can no longer manage to bring about by his personal *action* (Dupuy and Robert, 1976: 30). This can be best exemplified by the growing dependence on business to produce memorable, 'meaningful' leisure time for overworked and deskilled consumers, such as theme parks or shopping experience. A pioneering example of this practice, Club Méditerranée, started selling holidays promising authenticity in people's relationship to others and to nature in the post-68 period. Today, this enormous need is addressed through the development of what is termed 'experiential marketing'.

According to Dupuy and Robert, culture consists of an organised system of symbols (language, art, myth and ritual) that enables human beings to 'establish signifying relations between themselves and with their world, to find a meaning for their environment and their lives' (ibid:57). In this way culture satisfies an immense need felt by man. Yet wage labour or heteronomous work does not (or fails in part to) make such culture possible, according to André Gorz. In this perspective, shared by Illich, the act of production in late capitalism lacks the unpredictable and gratuitous character of a human act. Often standardised according to pre-set patterns and rationalised to achieve efficiency, always aiming at profit and managed through a complex organisation, wage labour will never be the product of an autonomous creative being.

This unpredictability of human action also has a bearing on what politics and history are about. The thesis of the existence of end-goals of history, such as has been found for more than a century in the ideology of progress in its various scientific versions (including the Marxist ones), is rejected. Consequently, anti-determinism is written into the principles of political ecology and also characterises the Utopia of a liberation

from work developed within this current of thinking. We shall see that, in Gorz, an *interpretation* of the *possible* orientation of current changes replaces an understanding of existing, intangible laws of history; the sense or direction of history, never given, has to be constructed by the social actors. In political ecology, the victory of heteronomy marks the castration of the political dimension of man. Now, at present, the opposition between autonomy and heteronomy reflects the opposition between the political and the rational. The dominance of the latter terms over the former arises from the confusion between *technè* and *praxis*, between *homo faber* – the rational maker, assigning means to ends – and active man. Instead of their *necessary complementarity*, the paralysis of autonomous capacities by the overdevelopment of heteronomous systems means that active man is stifled by *homo faber*, who is now merely reduced to a worker-consumer.<sup>13</sup>

### Autonomy, heteronomy and counter-productivity

It is important, as Dupuy and Robert point out, not to criticise every effort to organise society rationally, since a degree of specialised training is necessary to provide the material and institutional conditions to allow individuals to take autonomous action. These two modes of activity, heteronomous and autonomous, belong to two distinct spheres. However, this distinction is *theoretical* only; the two in reality interact in every society. Thus, for example, in many fields the autonomous sphere does not exist without some heteronomous production. The ideal operation of society would, in fact, involve a *synergy* between the two (heteronomous and autonomous) modes of production.<sup>14</sup>

A key notion in Illich's thinking was the threshold or watershed of counterproductivity. As soon as certain watersheds are passed, the expansion of the heteronomous mode of production impairs the individual's capacity for autonomous production. This establishes a vicious circle; it is as though the system had acquired a form of self-regulation independent of the will and aims of those who believe they are managing it. The overall outcome turns against the objectives pursued by each individual separately.<sup>15</sup> This impairment of individuals' capacities for autonomous production brings about a demand for – and hence an increased production of – goods and services by the heteronomous system, further impairing these capacities. In other

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13. The philosophy of Hannah Arendt provides fundamental inspiration for this perspective on work.

14. Nevertheless, Illich was very much aware of the difficulty of imagining a society in which industrial organisation would be balanced and kept in check by distinct and complementary modes of production. Deformed by industrial habits, we have lost even the 'vision of new possibilities' (Illich, 2001:xi–xii).

15. In this connection, Sartre has spoken of 'counter-finality'. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: I. Theory of Physical Ensembles* (1976). Gorz takes up this idea in his *Critique of Economic Reason* (1989: 47).

words, the heteronomous production of a commodity only enhances the autonomous conception of the corresponding personal purpose up to a certain point. 'Beyond this point, the synergy between the two modes of production paradoxically turns against the purpose for which both the use-value and commodity were intended' (Illich, 1996:71). Illich has brought out with particular talent the role of the myths of excess, or the myths of *hubris* that bear the technical project along. He registers the failure of the modern enterprise – the substitution of machines for men – which has turned into an implacable process of enslavement of the worker/producer and of consumer brainwashing. Man's control over his tools has turned around and become the control of man by his tools.<sup>16</sup> The following quote from Illich casts light on how he saw the transition to a society diversifying modes of production: 'Convivial reconstruction demands the disruption of the present monopoly of industry, but not the abolition of all industrial production'. It requires a reduction in the social polarisation due to tools, in order that there may coexist a *dynamic plurality of complementary structures in the productive forces and hence a plurality of milieus and elites* (Illich, 2001:73).<sup>17</sup>

In the system of large-scale planned obsolescence in which we live, change and innovation are valued for their own sake. This results in the continuous replacement of products and the constant reshaping of modes of organisation and aspects of shared culture that once helped to maintain individuals' sense of identity and stability. Also, some decision-making centres impose innovation on the whole of society and deprive what Illich calls 'communities' of a choice of orientation. His well-known critique of tools is intended also to establish that these impose the direction and pace of innovation. This admirably brings out how innovation costs us dear in every sense of the term.

The cult of obsolescence is, ultimately, destructive of nature and humanity, in its effect on culture, meaning and the social bond. We have arrived at the stage of industrial production where obsolescence affects human beings themselves; they are regarded as the ultimate resource to be made to yield a profit in a frantic process of constant improvement of the market value of their own persons, a process based on the blurring of the distinction between a professional career and ethical goals or life-projects – in particular, the obsolescence that is today renamed 'innovation', that constant improvement held up for admiration in the writings of Charles Handy, with his philosophy of the 'second curve' for the new 'portfolio workers' (see the section in Chapter 6 called 'Alternative management of a rare resource: time').

Illich's belief in the existence of watersheds and natural scales and limits that would prevent us from crossing certain thresholds beyond which the balance of life could not unfold in all its dimensions, suggests the need for criteria to identify these

thresholds clearly. In the course of a political process, the population could use such criteria to keep the development of tools below critical thresholds. This reflects Illich's call not to allow tools to escape democratic political control. Illich's aim is undoubtedly a humanistic one in that the essential object of his thinking is exclusively human society and the quality of the relations that can be formed within it, his objective being to maximise the freedom and autonomy of individuals without forgetting their membership of communities (Bourg, 1996:84–5).

Some may criticise Illich for his dreams of a convivial society. But such critics forget the extreme latitude the intellectual and political climate of the post-1968 period allowed in this field to *all research* and the teeming of possibilities that we look back on both with amusement and nostalgia today. My aim is to attempt to think through the transition towards a post-wage-based society within the perspectives opened up by Illich and Gorz.



### 3. Introduction to the Gorzian problematic

#### The critique of work is the defence of autonomy

André Gorz is undeniably the most fertile recent thinker on the question of work and the scope of the cultural change taking place. The perspicacity of his remarks, the originality of his analyses and the radicalism of his proposals make his a central contribution to the perspective of the kind of socialist, political ecology I advocate. These features are a spur to thinking in a society in which work is no longer the fundamental structuring element. That is to say, they provide the theory required if we are to begin to respond to the challenge of both social and ecological destruction on a planetary scale, and to demand, by all possible means, the freeing-up of time promised by the unprecedented development of technologies.

Gorz's work is exemplary of the values that must be defended in the field of political ecology. He pursued a socialism built on the development of individual and collective autonomy. Autonomy, far beyond being just a reduction of the alienation of labour, implies that the individual is the sole judge of values.<sup>18</sup> This centrality of autonomy is absolutely essential for understanding the critique of work he has developed. For him the autonomy of the individual represents the sine qua non for a radical transformation of society.<sup>19</sup> Yet today the individual's experience in work comprises, as we shall see, of an insuperable heteronomy.

Gorz recognises how the split within the social system and the divorce between rationalities fragments people's lives between professional and private, each of these being dominated by different – if not, indeed, contradictory – norms and values. On the one hand are economic values of efficiency, productivity and competitiveness and, on the other, comfort, security, love and the ability to empathise, for example. This split deprives us of meaning and freedom, and installs a process of general dehumanisation in the modern economic order. Gorz insists, however, that the solution is not the takeover of the means of production by the workers, since industry, as the offspring of capitalism, presupposed not only the economic rationalisation of work – i.e. the separation of the producer from his product and the means of producing it – but also its functionalisation.

The lesson to be drawn from the failure of so-called socialist systems is quite fundamental: the Marxian Utopia of the coincidence between functional work and personal activity is *not realisable on the scale of large systems*. This underpins the whole of the Gorzian critique of wage-labour: the functionality of each of the cogs in the industrial–bureaucratic mega-machine requires that a predetermined subdivision of labour be perpetuated, to the point where this functionalisation of activities cannot be retranslated into the terms of voluntary social collaboration. And, going even further, ‘the *functional* integration of individuals will prevent their social integration: the functional predetermination of their relations with each other will exclude them from forming reciprocal relations based on co-operation, for the purpose of achieving common objectives according to common criteria. It will prevent the execution of their tasks from being lived by them as co-operation and group membership’ (Gorz, 1989:43). The originality of the Marxist path chosen by Gorz resides, then, in the fact that *heteronomy is written into the very structure of the industrial mode of production*. Gorz does not neglect the importance of the struggle for positive transformations of the contents and organisation of work, and against the deterioration of working conditions, *but he shows the limits of that struggle*. Many ambiguities and misunderstandings are dissipated if it is understood that Gorz has never opted for a liberation from work as against a liberation in work. He has simply been concerned to show the *insuperable* limits of the latter and to draw from this the theoretical and strategic consequences for a policy on work. Thus, *formal autonomy* in the execution of work and in working relations is not in any circumstances to be confused with *existential autonomy*. For Gorz, the basis for a work-based culture and the conditions for a workers’ culture coinciding with ‘the humanism of work’,<sup>20</sup> which was the Utopian goal of the socialist and trade-union movements, disintegrated with the disappearance of craft occupations during the growing specialisation of knowledge and the international division of labour.

But there is more to it than this. The development of this Utopian vision of work inevitably entails a denial of the marginalisation of a growing mass of workers. Gorz’s argument provides us with solid grounds for questioning the claims of the ‘new work’ ideologues who claim that more of the work we do today is fulfilling because it uses

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18. Gorz has shown his extraordinary capacity to adapt his thinking to the development of capitalism, but there is a real continuity to his work: an emancipatory socialist project of undeniable coherence. As Conrad Lodziak and Jeremy Tatman note, ‘the shifts in focus in Gorz’s thinking must be understood within the context of his underlying commitment to emancipation’ (1997:55).

19. As his friend Herbert Marcuse, that other thinker of individual liberation, did in the past, he regards the individual’s aspirations to autonomy as potentially revolutionary. And it is quite clear that it is the conviction that this potentiality exists that underpins the whole of the critique of work developed by Gorz. Hence, in my view, the visionary quality of his writings.

20. Where work would be the main vehicle through which human beings would realise their most human characteristics (e.g. creativity, self-reliance, comradeship, etc.)

workers' intelligence and co-operation skills to manage sophisticated systems. These latest forms of work organisation, which presuppose co-operation between a company's employees to achieve objectives set by its management, are based on a total segmentation of the working class and a dualisation of society. This is because, in the new international context, companies have no choice but to pursue a two-pronged strategy of increased flexibility: to reduce the cost of unskilled labour by replacing it with automated plant on the one hand and, on the other, to call on a minority of 'new workers' to take over the running of that plant intelligently. Or, alternatively, to call on a growing mass of peripheral workers, rendered insecure by the policy of digital flexibility, and an elite – the stable core – which is motivated and relatively protected, so long as it is capable of great functional flexibility (adaptability, autonomy, creativity, effectiveness, etc.).

At the time of the rapid development of Taylorism,<sup>21</sup> skilled workers' identification with their employment acquired a corporatist, elitist and, ultimately, conservative character. Similarly, today, the ethics of the newly professionalised workers are bereft of any humanist content in a situation where work is no longer the main productive force and where, as a consequence, there are insufficient jobs.<sup>22</sup> In such a situation, says Gorz, a morality based on effort and, more generally, a work-based ideology, merely conceal ultra-competitive egoism and careerism (1989:69). He recently asserted that, insofar as the post-Fordist elite produces both wealth and unemployment at the same time, 'It is crazy to present a form of work which ensures that there is less and less work and wages for everyone as the essential source of autonomy, identity and fulfilment *for all*' (Gorz, 1999:46). He argues that identification with work should, in these conditions, entail an appropriation of work *in all its implications*, including the social level, and hence it should imply a politicisation of trade unionism. Ethics with regard to work have, however, largely remained those of the trade unions, which have failed to take account of the interests of insecure, temporary workers, or of those excluded from production. What developments there have been in this direction are recent.

In this critique Gorz makes his most original and fruitful contribution to the debate on the current changes in the organisation of production. It strikes at all – present and past – efforts to legitimate work as *the model*, par excellence, of social integration: *the ethical valorisation of work is a dangerous choice that leads to a dead end when the production of wealth requires less and less human labour and is driving an increasing fraction of the population out of the world of work.*

The best possible policy is, according to Gorz, one that shares out jobs and wealth equitably. And this is also the obligatory *starting point* for a truly alternative employment policy.

We shall verify the exactness of this diagnosis in the light of recent developments within work in Chapters 5 and 6. But essentially, the new management practices, whose objective is to value and optimise human resources, are not a concession on the part of employers to the humanism of work, but a new way of manipulating employees required by technological change and the international economic situation.

### In defence of socialist politics

Gorz's campaign is for shorter working hours. This arises out of his rejection of a *total* submission to the technical imperatives of machinery. Some commentators incorrectly assumed that he rejects the imperatives of work and of technical culture. This, however, is a misinterpretation, for what he rejects is only their *domination* of daily life. The increased power of technology admittedly cuts life off from work, narrows the field of sensory experience and existential autonomy, and prevents the worker from having knowledge and control of the ultimate purpose of his activity. However, this technicisation is an acceptable price to pay *when, by increasing the efficiency of labour, machines allow people to save time and effort* for activities that are sources of meaning. Gorz puts faith in Marx's prediction of greater self-fulfilment outside work thanks to a considerable reduction of necessary labour-time spent in production. The *Kulturgesellschaft* (a society organised around cultural and humanistic values<sup>23</sup>) that Gorz calls for assumes that the cultural and the social take precedence over the economic so that we can move from a productivist and work-based society to a society of free time. Now, this is the true meaning of the Green movement: the defence of a culture of the everyday, of what Illich called vernacular values. Gorz's whole aim is to 'humanize, or in other words to give a meaning to the profound technological changes that are taking place, *drawing on those changes* to promote a new social organization' (Bourg, 1996:88).

The struggle against economic rationality's domination over the last two centuries can be summed up, Gorz tells us, as the continuous attempt to *contain* that economic rationality. From this point of view, socialism is the positive response to the disintegration of social bonds under capitalism. Subordinating economic rationality to societal goals will naturally restrict the application of economic criteria to the management of companies and subject their activities to social and ecological necessities. This is, in fact, a key demand of Green movements both at the national

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23. This *Kulturgesellschaft* is the opposite of our work-centred society, or *Arbeitsgesellschaft* in German.

level and at the level of international free-trade agreements. It is also made by Third-Worldist movements and by writers with a planetary critical perspective on the development of capitalism. The *re-embedding of the economic sphere* in the social advocated here is, in fact, the point of convergence of the various components of a broad current movement that is critical of the effects of globalisation and of the hegemony<sup>24</sup> of economic discourse.<sup>25</sup> Gorz has certainly been and remains one of the most active promoters of this demand that limits be set on economic rationality.

A socialist politics should promote the control of markets by the citizens themselves (not simply by government bodies), together with the development of a social way of life based on voluntary co-operation. Thus there is a bond between autonomy and the democratic process, guaranteeing a genuinely active citizenship. On this point again, political ecology is at one with all those who are pursuing a renewal of the political dimension and a revitalisation of democracy.

How, then, does Gorz position himself in the endlessly renewing debates on the role of the state today? He believes that a degree of planning is indispensable for a complex society and is not incompatible with any form of ownership. Of greater importance are the co-ordination of plans made privately or, indeed, publicly, and the setting of priorities for the economy in the medium and long term. In other words, ensuring socially and ecologically sustainable development.

All forward planning involves, by definition, a degree of uncertainty, but the adjustment to an unstable economic context will be made all the easier by public and private decision-makers comparing and contrasting their plans with each other. So, for example, the forward management of employment should be practised *at the very level of society and for its benefit*, at risk of otherwise increasing the dualisation of society. In this way, a social project and dynamic would incontestably promote the equitable sharing of paid and unpaid work by offering a direction and a framework for multiple initiatives.

Is there a tension between Gorz's vision for the state and his libertarian orientation, or does he, as some critics have argued, advocate an intolerable statism? Not so, in my opinion; it is precisely because he aims to increase autonomy that he maintains

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24. The words 'hegemony' and 'hegemonic' are generally used to denote a domination or supremacy.

25. Periodicals such as *Écologie et Politique*, *Transversales science/culture*, *La Revue du MAUSS* and, of course, the newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique* and the weekly magazine *Politis*, contribute to this movement in France, as does the young ATTAC movement. This is an international movement created in December 1998 to campaign for the democratic control of the financial markets and their institutions, which uses the Internet as an instrument to gather the greatest possible resistance to neo-liberalism. One also thinks in this connection of the *Confédération paysanne* and the networks linked to it in the field of agriculture, which substitute an alternative vision of globalisation, based on the universalisation of a number of ethical principles, for the liberal one.

that there is a need for regulation over an unfettered liberalism, the destructive effects of which need no underlining today. To prevent *uncontrolled* domination, it is appropriate to organise as small as possible a sphere of regulation in a heteronomous mode. In short, the fundamental problem of a future eco-socialist society is the elimination not of the state, but of domination.

In *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-based Society*, Gorz returns to this issue of regulation by discussing the problem of the connections between community and society (1999:117–26). He emphasises that the distinction made between social and functional integration, together with the keen attention to the mediations required between the micro-social and macro-social levels, prevents him from falling into the trap of communitarianism<sup>26</sup> and enables him to warn pointedly against the fantasy of abolishing the political dimension.

Moreover, if there were still a need to clarify Gorz's rejection of an anarchist ideology, we could point to the following passage in *Reclaiming Work*:

*'that problem and those mediations are the problems of the political and of politics, which will not be made magically to fade away by communicative, consensual relations between local communities. We must accept that the village community cannot be extended to planetary scale – and neither can the self-managed co-operative. We must accept that the wealth of a society and a civilization also depend on the existence of large territorial collectivities, of cities, which are large enough for highly specialized and minority activities to exist in them... And it depends too on the existence of large-scale bodies and public services... And all this presupposes that society will produce an accumulable 'economic surplus', and that there will, therefore, be money functioning as a universal equivalent, known and accepted rules applicable to all, and consequently a legal code and system, an organ of co-ordination and equalization, in short the thing we call a state.'* (1999:110)

Consequently, the 'political' may be defined as the specific space of tension between opposite poles or fields: community and society, or life-world and system, and, more fundamentally, autonomy and heteronomy. This tension reflects the capacity for self-determination and self-regulation of individuals and groups, on the one hand, and the constraints that arise from the operation of society as a set of complex apparatuses and institutions on the other (ibid:125). The key to development for a society lies in the dynamic interaction between these two poles. Any shackling of this process presents the risk of, at best, conformism, and at worst, authoritarianism.

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26. A political and social doctrine for which both the functioning of the political as well as the individual's identity and wellbeing are entirely founded in the community.

Gorz argues<sup>27</sup> for 'productive co-operation and self-organized social exchanges', to increasingly take on 'a political dimension, through which the insertion of local activities into their wider context can be managed, so that the micro-social ensembles can themselves assume a growing proportion of their mediations with the social whole and become actors in macro-social decisions, which will then come under pressure to link in with micro-social activities' (1999:110). This dialectic between universal and local goals, says Gorz, is the defining characteristic of politics. It has also long been one of the demands of political ecology.<sup>28</sup>

I argue, then, that we should restore meaning to socialism, i.e. we should see it as limiting the field of economic rationality and reorienting, through a democratic process, the economy and technology, and hence the model of consumption, towards an optimum quality of life. It is, moreover, accepted by increasingly broad groups of people that our society cannot perpetuate itself without some other orientation than that of obsession with economic and personal performance (the two things being increasingly lumped together in the 'new work'). The threat on the horizon is clearly that of a fundamentalism – in its nationalist, religious, etc. versions – using demoralised and impotent individuals as the playthings of faceless forces (the financial markets, etc.). Confronted with this situation, we should, says Gorz, meet the globalisation of capital not with rejection, but with another globalisation: a worldwide project for planetary civilisation. Or, alternatively, we should set a Utopia against an anti-Utopia. He therefore defends the need for a Utopian perspective, so as to *orientate* political action on the basis of an ultimate, necessarily radical, goal. The demand for Utopia in this precise sense seems to me to be one of the most original and stimulating aspects of his work, reflecting the relationship between the possible and the real.

Having now set the theoretical scene, in the next chapter I explore some of the recent changes affecting work and workers.

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27. Gorz draws here particularly on the writings of Rainer Land (1994), who has attempted to work out the premises of a politics based on ecological restructuring.

28. It is worth noting that I take the Marxist standpoint that historical development is a product of dynamic conflict, but it is unquestionably the case that we cannot claim to know what the outcome of that development will be. The fundamental issue is that of social relations – relations to nature and relations between human beings – but how that issue turns out is not something which can be wholly controlled. It is in this sense that political ecology is at one with the anti-determinism on which certain intellectual currents on the left are founded at this century's start, contrary to the narrowly deterministic liberal discourses of globalisation, of the financial markets, etc. This is also the reason why the dream of micro-breaks with the existing order, of a meaning not so much written on the horizon, but which is to be constructed, has substituted itself for the Utopian goal of a revolutionary overthrow of the system. In other words, these currents on the left are called on to sustain a project – or projects – of social transformation, while renouncing historical predictions. Here I borrow the fine phrase that Daniel Bensaïd himself takes from Saint Augustine, when he says that we now have to 'work for the uncertain' (Bensaïd, 1996).





## PART 2

### Changes to Work



## 4. On the nature of work

### Introduction: The invention of work

Since the 1990s all those involved in the current debate on the crisis of work have pointed to the changes work is currently undergoing to justify a re-think of what work actually is. In such a process of re-definition, the reference to history and, secondarily, to anthropology is inescapable; especially as the present crisis of work is also, undeniably, *a crisis of its representation*. It will, therefore, be essential to borrow from historical and anthropological studies for an analysis of the contents of work contained in the contemporary debate – although this is not without its methodological problems. Current writing on work falls into two schools: the historicist and the essentialist.<sup>29</sup> I am even tempted to speak of two opposing ‘camps’, for, as we shall see, they clash over the proper definition of work. The two schools agree that work is currently undergoing great change, both of them taking the view that the current crisis is an opportunity to establish a better social order. They do, however, offer different readings of this crisis, and their models for the future are no less diverse. Different perceptions of the society that is in gestation are in play here. These writers, united in a questioning of the value and status of work and of economic mechanisms, are competing in the pursuit of a new model of the worker-citizen.

The historicist school is part of a critical tradition that runs from the Greeks to Habermas by way of Hannah Arendt. It is within this first school that political ecology has its place. This school defends the principle of a liberation *from* work, which is now more accessible than ever by virtue of technical development. It diagnoses the ‘end of work’ as we know it, which has only existed for a brief historical period in any case. These writers have often been referred to as the ‘high priests’ of post-wage-based society.

The essentialist school takes the view that a liberation *in* work is more than ever possible, thanks to the current positive new departures in work practices. To those who advocate the end of the work-based society and look for a social wage, a certain

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29. For a detailed description of these two schools, the best reference is undoubtedly Dominique Méda, *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition* (1995). I have drawn greatly on this work in this section.

number of writers in the essentialist school reply that work is still the main provider of social identity today. Thus they call for a broadening of the notion of work, rather than exiting from work-based society. I believe this view to be erroneous.

To support my standpoint, I would like to take a historical perspective. In my view, the notion of work is a modern one; it was born with industrial capitalism. Our societies have, then, been based on work for a relatively short period in human history. Before this, people's main needs were met by self-producing within the framework of the domestic and village community through a variety of (subsistence) activities that were neither evaluated nor exchanged. As commodity production and consumption lost their marginal character, 'work' carried out in the public space appeared as a measurable and paid activity, as it acquired an exchange value and was done for other people in general. This work 'in general' is Marx's 'abstract labour'. It was the separation of producers from their means of production that made primitive accumulation possible (the production of a surplus necessary for the expanded reproduction of the means of production), a precondition for the birth of the industrial mode of production.

Thus considered, work, according to Roger Sue, is 'the vehicle of the accomplishment of modernity' or, to put it another way, modernity is born of the transference of the Messianic charge from religion to work.<sup>30</sup> As a materialisation of the Christian ideology in which it originated, the ideology of work, which, as we have seen, merges with that of productivism, promises nothing less than salvation. We may even say that the debate specific to modernity is that of liberation by work. This is particularly true of the nineteenth century, the point at which this Messianic conception of work reached its height.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, work is not work in its anthropological sense (see below), but the activity that emerged with industrial capitalism or was, rather, imposed by force<sup>32</sup> by capitalist development as a quantifiable commodity. In short, it is only in an economic sense that one can understand the emergence of work.

This point constituted one of the cardinal points of Gorz's critical argument: 'work is an activity deployed for the purposes of commodity exchange and is necessarily subject to an accounting calculation in order that it should be accomplished as

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30. Roger Sue, *Temps et ordre social* (1994). The decisive contribution of the Reformation to the progressive valorisation of the idea of work highlighted by Max Weber is now well-known: see Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930).

31. One thinks here of Saint-Simon, for whom work was the creative activity par excellence, the only possible objective of politics being to promote production.

32. We know what resistance the spread of wage-labour gave rise to. The reference work on this point is Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

efficiently as possible' (1994).<sup>33</sup> Thus, the personal satisfactions (interest, pleasure, etc.) the worker may possibly derive from work are merely *secondary* aims.

However, this 'historicist' definition of work has been muddled by those writers who offer an anthropological definition of work (described in the next section). In my view, this 'anthropologicistic' bias, opting for an extensive definition, has, at least in certain cases, led us down a blind alley of mutual incomprehension. It is, however, also true that there is a real conflict here: disagreements over definitions relate to genuinely divergent views on how the present crisis is to be overcome. The following lines are, therefore, motivated by a desire to bring clarity to this debate.

### Towards a rigorous definition of work

According to some of those who offer an anthropological definition of work, work dates from the serial production of tools by *Homo habilis* and is, therefore, constitutive of humanity. In the view of others, it emerged with the Neolithic revolution, when the first agricultural societies organised themselves around production. However, this ambiguity disappears when we adopt a restrictive definition of work (as emblem of modernity) and one contemporaneous with the development of capitalism – a definition I summarised above. If this is done, then work can be dated from the first upheavals of the end of the medieval period, and on, through its valorisation as the foundation of the social order in the eighteenth century, to its generalisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when, for the majority of the population (a largely male population, of course, until recent times), selling their time for a wage constituted their major or sole resource.

This opposition between two definitions of work – as an anthropological invariant or as an invention of modernity – would be of little interest were it not of some significance for my argument. For beneath the semantic imbroglio lies a fundamental divergence of theoretical/political choices: if work is this *same* activity, encountered from time immemorial and across the globe, then it *is* the human condition (which we cannot escape), and the experience of it can only be ameliorated through the positive changes made possible by the information revolution. More precisely, individual autonomy can be attained only *in* work, for in this essentialist model<sup>34</sup> an outside-of-work or 'post-work' autonomy is not conceivable. Circumventing this human condition is a literally meaningless notion.

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33. Gorz also writes that it is a 'measurable, exchangeable and interchangeable' activity, 'done in the public domain' (1994:53).

34. A model based on the dichotomy between appearance and essence, in which one can decipher an unchanging essence of work beneath its different historical expressions.

The philosopher Yves Schwartz is one of the leading figures of the essentialist tendency. He takes a clear stance against the idea of an ‘invention of work’, since to put a date on the ‘birth’ of work and the emergence of wage-labour would be to cut work off from its interlinkages with the other forms of human activity. This reflects his focus on the general characteristics of human activity, which leads simply to the concept of work being watered down to an enormous degree into that of activity and, *a fortiori*, as we shall see, to an all-encompassing definition of activity. In his view, work traverses and travels between various forms of activity, *some* of which take the form of ‘employment’ and *others* of which do not – work for oneself, work on oneself, domestic labour, activist, strategic and political work – categories that, as we can see, include very different orders of activity. According to Schwartz, ‘any form of activity in any circumstances always requires variables to be managed in historical situations that are always in part singular, and hence decisions and discriminations to be made that are sometimes barely conscious’ (1997a:42). He concludes that, ‘we cannot say where work begins and ends because every activity has about it something of the order of a confrontation with a milieu one has not created and towards which one attempts to create one’s own norms’, and ‘every activity (being) a debate with norms, work fundamentally belongs to this register’(1997b:118). But surely we are forced to object that this constant negotiation between a living being and a milieu – physical and social conditions and other living beings, etc. – can be applied to almost every moment of human existence! It comes as no surprise that at such a level of philosophico-anthropological generality, Schwartz ultimately has very little to say about his subject, other than that there are in work elements that are the defining characteristics of humanity! Arguing for the multiple meanings of work goes hand in hand here with essentialism in a discourse in which the conceptual apparatus provides very poor cover for the emptiness of its propositions.

So I offer a radically different choice to this extensive conception of work, this essentialist model. I acknowledge the *discontinuities* of the history and geography of human activities and propose *a restrictive and more rigorous definition of work – I hold that work is a modern invention*. This methodological decision reflects the dichotomous Gorzian model: modern work is characterised by an insurmountable heteronomy and consequently, no autonomy in work can be confused with existential autonomy. This being the case, the critique of work defines itself as the defence of autonomy, that is to say, as the extension of the field of activities not subject to market rationality.

In summary, the question that arises here is whether the definition proposed by historicist writers works or not. I believe it does. I subscribe to the thesis of the invention of work because this is the only way we can understand the genuinely

unprecedented character of the crisis we are currently living through and develop a new approach for the future. In the introduction to his most recently translated book (into English), Gorz seeks to put an end to the confusion within the French debate on work: 'I hate the fraudsters who, in the name of the philosophical or anthropological definition of work, justify the value of a form of "work" which is the very negation of that definition' (1999:2). Rejecting the end of work in the name of its permanence or philosophical necessity is a dead end. By contrast, recovering the possibility of genuine work presupposes that we accept exit from the work-based society. For, if it is possible to abolish work in the form which we are familiar with today, this is actually because it is a social construction – it 'performs a socially identified and normalized function in the production and reproduction of the social whole' and, as such, constitutes a powerful means of socialisation (ibid:3).

The debate is apparently complicated somewhat here, since there is in this an acceptance of the existence of an anthropological meaning to work. But my approach enables us to understand the difference between this position and the anthropologicistic one I criticised above: the true work in its anthropological sense defined here as creative activity *is not* to be found through, or even beyond, wage labour carried out in the commodity sphere. 'It is, admittedly, indisputable', acknowledges Gorz, 'that "work" in the sense of a poesis is a historical-fundamental need: the need the individual feels to appropriate the surrounding world, to impress his or her stamp upon it and, by the objective transformations he or she effects upon it, to acquire a sense of him- or herself as an autonomous subject possessing practical freedom' (1994:55), but the idea that this need can be satisfied, even in the new work of the information age, is henceforth ruled out in the historicist perspective that I share. From this perspective, the ideal of liberation *from* work is in no way a renunciation of the humanist concept of the individual as a creative and sociable human being. On the contrary, the critique of work attests to a more rigorous definition of autonomous, non-alienated praxis than the one to which Marxist or humanist thinkers of the left subscribe. Being also more demanding – the ideal being that the outcome of activities should correspond to the intention that gave rise to them – this definition justifies the demand that heteronomous work should lose its centrality (Bowring, 1995:344).

### A prescribed subjectivity or the new face of heteronomy?

To give it some credibility, we must examine the historicist approach in the light of recent findings in industrial sociology. This approach views work in a *subjective sense*, which means that, rather than merely describing work situations, it is interested in the meaning that work has for the individual in the workplace. A large

number of studies are based on workers' observation and experience (communicated by interviews) within modern companies. The confrontation between the two schools is all the more pertinent, then, as the Gorzian heritage is precisely one of a demand for a liberated subjectivity. In the following pages I argue that although subjectivity is now acknowledged in work, and has indeed undeniably been reintroduced into it (this may even be said to be one of the basic characteristics of the post-Taylorist era), the subjectivity in question is fundamentally ambiguous, for what we are seeing is a *problematic process of the rationalisation of subjectivity*. As we will see, as much as the physical and technical abilities of the subject at work, their very personal qualities are now mobilised in the labour process. In other words, the mobilisation of labour power by companies is now genuinely *total*. Since the objectives of the company are internalised by the workers, exploitation has become self-exploitation.

Yves Clot's research in occupational psychology reaches similar conclusions (1995), even though he never wholly departs from an essentialist approach (in which work is the manifestation of being human). Clot shows that, with the rise of information technology, it is the meaning accorded by workers to their own exchanges that determines the effectiveness of the interaction between work teams and the system. For that work to be effective, human resources are required that can be activated and mobilised. The whole personality of those who work is now summoned into the workplace, to such a degree that it is legitimate to speak of a transition from a Taylorist prescription of operations to a prescription of subjectivity. The responsiveness of the workforce to the company's demands is, indeed, the 'new frontier' for companies. Now, research within firms presents us with the following paradox: 'On the one hand, this nagging concern of the managers to intensify the subjective relation to work tends to sacralize [make sacred] occupational activity. But, on the other hand, that same activity is most often regarded as a temporary residue of modernization, an object that is quickly repressed as soon as one can be rid of it' (ibid:8). This engenders what is literally a pathology of excellence, in parallel with an increasing sense of the unpleasantness of work; an unpleasantness which often combines with a permanent state of worry.

In these conditions, asks Clot, might not the prescription of subjectivity be said to reveal the success of an enterprise of subordination of the workforce that is at least the equal of Taylorism? His answer is a cautious one: if, in this new operant training, subjectivity finds itself merging with attachment to the company, one cannot circumvent its laws without incurring harm. One of the subjective originalities of the present crisis of work is the exacerbation of original antagonisms, concludes Clot: change does not necessarily mean progress, he observes, for the dominant economic model can digest these transformations only at excessive social cost, by piling one



ordeal upon another for a world of work that is on the road to generalised casualisation. Moreover, the human responsiveness summoned up by technical changes is increasingly poorly tolerated by the system: economic motives have got down as far as the shop floor and are shared there, but the employees whose subjectivity it has been possible to mobilise are less and less keen to accept not being in a position to question the end goals imposed on their acts of labour by smaller and smaller, and ever more covert social groups.

Clot's entire book is filled with foreboding that the system may implode, since it fails to take account of the fact that this prescription of subjectivity is not a groundswell threatening the system with fragmentation, but constitutes, rather, *one of the fundamental mechanisms of the current transformation of the system*.<sup>35</sup> For the system can afford these excessive social costs, the limits of occupational psychology being that it does not theorise the socio-political factors that keep the system in being, which relate, precisely, to a balance of forces unfavourable to employees in an artificially maintained situation of scarcity of employment (of non-sharing of work). Clot's study undermines those wishing to believe in a current humanisation of work; though the individual is now integrated – in his intelligence and sensibility – into the production process, this is only to 'rationalise' him in the strict sense of the term. In my view, the critique of work in its new forms must be rooted in a refusal to sell on the labour market what is most specifically human – intellect and speech. I have every reason to believe that an unprecedented extension of capitalist/economic rationality – in Gorzian terms, of the logic of heteronomy – is in progress, in the form of the changes which both work itself and the conditions of employment are undergoing.

### The central conflict: Genuine autonomy or the appropriation of time?

Through the growth of the service-based economy, capitalism has dematerialised labour as much as capital, and rendered the boundary between the two arbitrary: now that intellect and its product, knowledge, have together become the main factor of production, *the human being itself is a unit of capital*. In this sense, the theory of human capital is entirely pertinent to the situation. This is the theory of Nobel prize-winner Gary Becker, who has, *inter alia*, analysed the economic importance of the family as capital to be exploited, and has broken it down into its various aspects: upbringing, training, education; talents and skills; wisdom and experience; positioning in the labour market; professional portfolio; client base; intellectual property; monies and assets; family and social networks; energy and health; personal

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35. Toyotism, involving the substitution of the total mobilisation of the worker's personality for his physical mobilisation, has taken over from Taylorism.

qualities. The direct implication of this is the casting aside of every individual not able to 'make good' in this new knowledge economy.

Given this state of affairs, 'post-Fordism presents itself both as the heralding of a *possible* reappropriation of work by the workers and as the regression towards a total subjugation and quasi-vassaldom of the very person of the worker. Both aspects are always present' (Gorz, 1999:32). This new area allows a *virtual* emancipation because human subjectivity is no longer excluded from the work process as it was during the Taylorist era. But this virtual emancipation co-exists with enhanced social control within what is a regression towards pre-modern social relations, since the antagonism between classes is denied. Conflictual relations maintained by negotiated compromise, the negligible or at least non-central character of worker involvement, and the performance of work limited in time and space by contract are all things that unravel with the decline of workers' rights, which had been patiently built up previously. The demand for total involvement and unconditional devotion to the company in the name of competitiveness means we are no longer dealing with the sale of abstract labour, but with the sale of the individual's very existence, with a 'personalization of subjection' (Virno, 1995).

In other words, in the age of what Marx termed *general intellect*, work in general, detachable from the person of the worker – described by Marx as abstract labour – is tending to disappear and, with it, workers' rights and the emancipatory function those rights performed. The ideology and practice of the sale of self are spreading only because the information revolution has made for a dramatic change both in the quantity and form of employment; scarcity of work creates the conditions for the submissiveness of the worker. At the same time, the value of professional skills among the elite in a minority of companies should not blind us either to the aggravated Taylorism that remains the lot of a majority of units sub-contracted to a parent firm, nor to the increasing precariousness of waged employment.

The basic ambiguity of these new developments is such that we absolutely must take certain positive trends *together* with the negative ones with which they are allied and see them as part of the same logical movement. It is not the case that these developments have within them a potentiality for personal liberation that is subsequently thwarted. They are, from the outset, characterised by greater self-determination, and also by greater heteronomy in the Gorzian sense. The former is now a vehicle for the latter, and this is precisely what, in our view, constitutes the unprecedented character of the current changes in the world of work. Recent statistical surveys and many case studies confirm, moreover, that companies are succeeding in mobilising their employees by operating through both communicative

rationality (co-operative relations within work collectives) and instrumental rationality (external market constraints and internal rules).<sup>36</sup> Thus there is a dual status of autonomy: the workers' own aspirations for autonomy are used by companies for their own ends. Given this situation, the actual nexus of conflict in an 'economy of the immaterial'<sup>37</sup>... relates to the status of that autonomy and its scope – autonomy's rights over itself... to the autonomy of autonomy, considered and valued not, in this case, as a necessary means, subjugated to the imperatives of competition and profit, but as the cardinal value on which all others rest and against which they are measured' (Gorz, 1999:74).

That the central character of communication and the intellectual faculties in the new forms of work represents the possibility of a greater – if not total – control on the part of the workers is largely a function of the historical conditions in which that control unfolds. Now, in the current context, these are precisely the conditions of a disastrous balance of forces between employee and employer. The realisation of this liberatory potential presupposes the loss of centrality of the wage relation itself, a loss that is to be fostered by all possible means. What has become the central stake in the conflict is, ultimately, the re-appropriation of time from its total submission to the demands of profitability. In other words, what is central is the question of *autonomy*. For autonomy in work does not spontaneously engender in individuals a greater demand for existential autonomy: 'Autonomy in work is of little significance when it is not carried into the cultural, moral and political spheres; and cultural, moral and political autonomy does not arise from productive co-operation itself but from activism, and from the culture of resistance, rebellion, fraternity, free debate...' (Gorz, 1999:40). Given this, the difficult and inescapable task that necessarily fall to radical critics of work is to take head-on the question of the *cultural mediations* that will lead to the contesting of the mode and end-goals of production. The thesis of autonomy in work, by contrast, evades the questions that have always been posed by critiques of productivism and consumerism: criticism of the objects and services produced by that work and of the definition of the needs those objects and services are intended to meet. It also evades a questioning of the relations between workers and those currently or potentially excluded from the process of production. Thus in the next section I explore the arguments for and against the centrality of work.

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36. This is the thesis of Thomas Coutrot, who argues that the new neo-liberal model of the mobilization of the labour force is distinguished by its use of enforced co-operation. See *L'Entreprise néo-libérale, nouvelle utopie capitaliste?* (1998).

37. Activities of the ever more important economic sector whose main purpose is to produce and trade in *intangible* goods (e.g. financial services, software, genetic codes, holidays and entertainment) are increasingly referred to as immaterial activities, or the immaterial sector, in order to emphasise the opposition with other types of economic activity whose resources are tangible and material (e.g. land, fossil fuels, other natural resources) and involve mainly physical labour and skills.



## 5. On the centrality of work

Many writers maintain that work cannot be abolished because of the central role it performs in society. Unfortunately, it is by no means easy to respond to this objection because of the diversity of meanings ascribed to the very term 'centrality' by these writers. In order to overcome this difficulty in the current debate on the centrality or, alternatively, loss of centrality, of work – and to clarify what is at stake in it – I will explore what may possibly be understood by 'centrality'.

### Accepting the paradoxical character of waged work today

One argument for work's centrality lies in the freedom it offers workers. But there is an ambiguity inherent in the 'freedom of labour'. The forms work assumed at its emergence were eminently paradoxical. During the French Revolution, whereas the land-owning nobility reserved work- – which they characterised as dependence – for commoners, the Revolution brought everyone the freedom to escape from their birth and from ancestral relations of dependency by contracting with others. Adam Smith relates the commoditisation of work to the freedom of everyone to sell their labour. Smith was aware of the fundamentally unequal character of the bond formed between employer and employee. But the important thing was that the individual gained independence, since he could then live from the exercise of his faculties without depending on anyone, contrary to those earlier forms of labour that were slavery and serfdom. In the nineteenth century work became something all-embracing, a fundamentally contradictory entity, articulated both economically and philosophically: on the one hand, the foundation of economic value and, on the other, the foundation of culture. Marx's thought is no doubt the best example of this contradiction. This inherent paradox of work was also clearly illustrated during the brief post-war boom that lasted until the mid-1970s, in which the birth of the social sphere, the hegemony of the market economy and workers' citizenship were closely interrelated. By elaborating protective arrangements – workers' rights within the company and security for all – the state rendered acceptable the extension of the market economy and the development of the labour market in which work is reduced to a commodity. Rather than an 'invention of the social sphere', it is more accurate

to speak here of an ‘interlinked construction of the economic and social spheres’...  
<sup>38</sup> ‘in a society where the market economy has acquired a primordial function, work articulates within it the relation between the economic and the social. Work is the site of a paradox that confers on it its essential place in modernity; it shows, through the wage relation, the exploitation of the worker in his dependence on capital; but, at the same time, thanks to the social rights associated with it, it affirms this same worker’s membership of the political community’ (Laville, 1994:37-38).

Since it has a price and a status, work means that workers do not have to form personal and private relationships with their employers or clients. The work contract inserts them, as social individuals in general, into the circuit of economic and social exchanges and marks them out, in our modern societies, as citizens. This paid work, granting access to the public sphere, has enabled women especially to emancipate themselves from confinement in the private sphere. It is, then, liberation, since it separates personal from public relationships, delimiting a public sphere from a private one in which the individual belongs to him or herself. In other words, socialisation through waged work and objectivisation of interpersonal relations are profoundly liberating since they signify a lesser absorption of subjectivity. The acknowledgement of this inherent ambiguity sets me apart from writers who have wrongly sought to conceal it.

Thus, on the one hand we need to stress the fact that waged work is *simultaneously* an instrument of alienation and emancipation, without the one ever being able to subsume the other; and, on the other hand, to maintain the thesis of the historicity of work. For these two opposing characteristics do not reflect the opposition between an essence and an existence: they are *historically constituted*. There is no paradox in recognising that the major source of social identity today remains waged work and, at the same time, that it is a historical form destined to be overcome, not an anthropological invariant.

If we agree that work is a factor of identity and social integration, we do so in a very precise sense: *work is not integrative in itself, but it is so because it is the historically determined form of social integration*. Work, which has up to now been the dominant social relation, represents the integrative element in our society. Unlike all previous societies, industrial society is, by definition, a society of workers. This can be attested by all who are deprived of it, for whom waged work is, in most cases, perceived as the most important factor of socialisation. Consequently, to withstand the essentialist temptation is effectively to refuse to believe that work is the vehicle

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38 I borrow from Jean-Louis Laville (1994:38) this critical remark on Jacques Donzelot's argument in his work *L'Invention du social* (1984).

par excellence – if not indeed the necessary vehicle – of these functions of individual and collective identification and expression. We must resist the argument, sometimes advanced, that the psychological gratifications offered in work are the same as in life. This can certainly not constitute a justification for perpetuating the centrality of work! Instead, we should recreate such gratifying experiences in other spheres of daily life, where it is less likely there will be the same level of prescriptiveness.

In conclusion, I accept that work is still an essential vector of social integration, which will not be quickly replaced, and it still provides a strong basis for individual identity (though decreasingly so), but it will never again be the ‘great integrator’ it once was. It is in this shifting landscape that we must operate. This is why, to see if the centrality of work can be overcome, we should consider the value of work, and explore the argument that work is a vehicle of identity and integration.

### On work as value: The case for an inversion of meaning

The fact that work is a source of identity and social cohesion does not mean that it has to be valued and even promoted as the primordial source of *these things*. Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that it is *absolutely* destined to remain such a source.

In fact, I question whether this famous identification with work has not been a little overdone, even during the post-war boom years. Studies of that period have shown that identities formed through work were a reality only among the supervisory staff of the company, whereas, for the ordinary staff and unskilled or semi-skilled workers, such identities were accessible only in the long term, through social advancement and by submitting to the constraints of work in exchange for gains in free time and consumption (see Ème and Laville (1994:13). Furthermore, the halting of this process through mass unemployment means that an increasing inability to identify with work co-exists with an increasing centrality of employment as a means of access to social existence. Quite naturally, the more difficult access to employment becomes, the greater the emotional investment in it and the greater the value people give to the role and place of work.

When asked to say how they would describe themselves, 33 per cent of French people questioned said their occupation, compared with 28 per cent who cited their neighbourhood or place of residence.<sup>39</sup> This primacy accorded to occupational

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39. Guillaume La Chaise (ed.), *Crise de l'emploi et fractures politiques* (1996:53). See, in particular, Chapter 1, ‘Le travail comme identité et comme valeur’. But it is interesting to note an explicit rejection of the company, which attests to the failure of the new managerial ideology to find any great resonance: when invited to choose what defined them least well, ‘the name of the company in which they worked’ came top of the list with 29 per cent of first choices.

identification is found among all social categories and the difficulties in the world of work have not diminished the primacy of employment. However, that primacy now has a different content: since jobs are now less manual and no longer provide protection from unemployment, the greatest identification with work is found among the knowledge elite (executives and professionals). This explains why work is more highly valued among those who are less securely anchored in the labour market. So, the jobless are systematically readier (45 per cent) than those in work (17 per cent) to say that they 'wholly agree' that, 'work is the most important thing in life today' (Lachaise, 1996). Empirical studies thus confirm what common sense tells us, and great rigour is required in the terms employed in this connection: there can be no doubt that what the unemployed and other excluded persons wish for above all is to get a job. How, indeed, could it be otherwise in a social order in which the main source of income, status and recognition is still waged work? Similarly, only a minority of those who perform the most fulfilling, skilled and, one hopes, creative tasks absolutely value work for itself. In this connection, another study indicates that work (employment would be a more accurate term) remains the most important thing in life at any age and, importantly, that 'it is those with the least education who rate the importance of work in life the highest and the importance of leisure the lowest' (Riffault, 1994:85-122, quoted in Ème and Laville, 1994:22).

The general difficulty of drawing unambiguous conclusions from research that produces seemingly divergent findings on changes in how work is valued dissipates somewhat when the socio-professional variable is clearly specified in this way and a distinction is made between employment and work. Thus, the long-term studies of Joffre Dumazedier (1988) have established that work as a value has been eroded to the advantage of the values of free time. And in Germany the sociologist Rainer Zoll (1989 and 1992) has revealed a drastic turnabout in young people's relation to work: They regard their work as a creative activity, an activity of self-fulfilment, but find their expectations dashed in the present labour market and tend, subsequently, to base their identities on relations based on genuine communication and on self-fulfilment. In this same vein, the findings of the European-level research programme, the European Values Survey, enable H el ene Riffault to stress the hold work still has as a value in Europe, but to point out on the other hand that, in spite of certain national and socio-professional variations, aspirations of a qualitative nature (e.g. to interesting work) are increasing more quickly overall than, and in some cases already outweigh, material concerns.<sup>40</sup>

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40. H el ene Riffault, 'Les europ eens et la valeur travail', *Futuribles*, 200, July-August (1995:25-46). For an interesting, detailed commentary of this same European survey, see Stephen D. Harding and Frans J. Hiksloops, 'Les nouvelles valeurs du travail dans la th eorie et la pratique', *Revue Internationale des Sciences Sociales*, 145, September 1995:501-18).



In reality, commitment to work fluctuates depending on its level of interest and on the alternative possibilities of satisfaction in the rest of the individual's life (Perret 1995:180). It is my view that the desire for work repeatedly expressed in the surveys ultimately reveals more about the cruel lack of opportunities for fulfilment in most people's lives than about the intrinsic virtues of waged work – virtues linked, among other things, to the individual's cultural resources.<sup>41</sup> This is why the studies that indicate a weakening of the work ethic do not necessarily contradict those that find a desire for work. Each reflects a different facet of a complex reality and one that is no doubt difficult to measure.

Increased job insecurity does not seem to have overcome the 'allergy to work' of the 1970s. That allergy has indeed made it through the winner-takes-all decade (the 1980s). 'Just because there is as yet no public substitute for work or no activity possessing a similar socially recognized and valued status, that does not mean that work represents an ideal of citizenship' (Sue, 1994:45), but 'the transition is not easy between work that is now slipping away from us and free time for which we are not yet ready' (ibid:73). Gorz echoes Sue on his. There is a paradox underlying the current impossibility of social change: in life and in people's minds, work retains the centrality it has in fact already lost, as it is being eliminated massively on the social scale. The centrality it has is a phantom centrality, in the sense that an amputee can feel pain from a phantom limb. We also take the view that the place work occupies in the future that each person envisages for him/herself is the stake in a conflict of a political nature, for what is at issue is being able to conceive differently, to formulate differently – for oneself and for others – what already exists in reality. The possibility of change lies, in fact, in an inversion of meaning. While the figure of the insecure worker is potentially the central figure of our own world, 'it is this figure which must be civilized and recognized so that, rather than being a condition one reluctantly bears, this pattern of working can become a mode of life one chooses, a mode that is desirable, one that is regulated and valued by society, a source of new culture, freedoms and sociality, establishing the right of all to choose the discontinuities in their working lives without experiencing a discontinuity in their income' (Gorz, 1999:53).

In conclusion, if a profound transformation of mentality is a precondition for economic and social change, this needs to find collective expression in discourse (and in practice). Against discourses which assert that we cannot but want a work-based society, it is important to debate publicly the radical nature of the implications of the current changes. That expression cannot be spontaneous, but depends on

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41. This is why the freeing-up of time presupposes a cultural project. This can in no sense be based solely on an economic policy.

considerable work interpreting and deciphering the meaning of those changes that is the task of a critical sociology.

### From the centrality of non-work to the non-centrality of work

Would it not be more pertinent, from this point of view, to speak of the centrality of non-work, which André Tösel shows to be the nihilistic, negative manifestation of the centrality of work itself? The impossibility of turning an ideology of work into an ideology of free time is as much an effect of the logic of the system as it is of individuals; for it is not conceivable that there should be a direct, immediate transition from the negative centrality of work to the positive centrality of non-work. This is why this barbaric turn of century is seeing the birth of 'superfluous man' (Tösel, 1995:209–18). The question that remains is, therefore: how can we bring another model into being?

The best way we could categorise work would be as fundamentally social (Freysenet, 1995:227–44). Work structures our societies from top to bottom. Putting the emphasis on work as a source of status, identity and cohesion may risk neglecting another characteristic of work: as a means of responding to scarcity in a socio-historical context in which all (or almost all) goods and services have a market value attached to them. It has become progressively more central as, for a growing number of individuals, labour power has become the precondition for accessing resources of all kinds that are required for daily survival.

According to Marx, work is the act of dominating nature so as to satisfy one's subsistence needs. But this central thesis of his writings is based on a naturalistic conception of vital needs. This 'self-evident fact' of food production as primal, pre-social historical fact is, to say the least, dubious. Michel Freysenet objects that human beings' conditions of existence are as much society, language and the transmission of knowledge as eating and drinking. But it is not the nature of the activity that defines work and makes it a heteronomous activity, but its insertion into the commodity sphere. So, for example, a single activity, such as cooking, may or may not be work, depending on whether it is performed within the economic sphere or not. Thus, with the expansion of market rationality into ever more fields, an ever larger number of activities come to be regarded as work. It is in this dual sense that work is becoming more and more central: both as obligatory survival activity for the greatest number and as encompassing more and more human activities. The question which arises, then, is that of the limits to be set on the commoditisation of human relations. And the demands for a guaranteed minimum income and for spaces for autonomous activities are responses to this question that are worthy of interest.

The advantage of seeing work as a social relation is that it enables us to conceive of society as a dynamic set 'of possible social relations in tension, in which one of these social relations socially creates scarcity (or scarcities) of vital commodities and regulates access to them' (Freyssenet, 1995:238).

Michel Beaud (1997) cites two essential reasons why work will, in his view, remain central for several decades. First, the spread of monetary and commodity relations implies that a growing number of people around the world will be earning a monetary income. The 'emerging' nations are, in effect, industrialising by mobilising an extremely high number of workers. Second, the dynamic of commodities in the capitalist system brings with it a proliferation of needs to which the development of waged employment responds.

However, this development of waged employment is catastrophic for a large part of the population. (I will address this point more fully in Chapters 8 and 9.) We know what working conditions are like in the many industries that subcontract to the Northern multinationals. Moreover, the massive disruptions of cultural practices and of the social fabric change the nature of needs, which cannot be met in the conditions of unbridled urbanisation and low wages that pertain. Consequently, Beaud's formulation is somewhat questionable: the development of salaried employment *does not satisfy* the proliferation of needs that is unleashed, since – and he stresses this point himself – the needs to be satisfied among the lowest strata of the population are enormous.

We should also be cautious in asserting that a large number of workers are mobilised in these economies: the principle of economising on labour also applies in the delocalised economies of the so-called emerging nations.<sup>42</sup> The jobs created in Mexico through globalisation, for example, involve only a very small workforce, which is poor compensation for the disruption caused by the very process of globalisation to the economic, social and ecological balances of the country. With the competition of cheap food imports, many small farmers are forced to migrate to urban areas where they face a loss of cultural identity combined with underemployment as the industrial plants set up by multinational companies cut down their labour needs through technology efficiencies and labour rationalisation. This decline in the number of jobs also applies to employees in the service sector and to middle managers; so no scope is left for the argument that labour will be 'displaced' into other sectors or that salvation will come through retraining and vocational education for all.

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42. It would be appropriate here to distinguish between different national contexts, though this would, unfortunately, take us away from our subject.

I agree with Beaud's conclusion: the end of work means 'ridding ourselves of the quasi-total grip of commodities, money relations and the logic of profit'. This involves, on the one hand, meeting everyone's basic needs by reducing inequality and, on the other, moderating needs in the Northern countries. Is not what is at stake in the current conflict between the advocates of a humanisation of work and the end-of-work theorists – a conflict over the meaning of the current changes to work – the setting of the limits within which work as a social relation must continue to structure both the social order and our individual lives? And, more specifically for the latter group, which includes critics of work from an eco-socialist standpoint, the question arises of how best to grasp the opportunity to be found in unemployment and generalised job insecurity.

Thus, having recognised that the centrality of work can be overcome, the *assertion of the non-centrality of work* is a radical political challenge to the increasingly unfettered power of the vectors of the hegemony of economic reason. This is to say that the crisis we have been witnessing over the last twenty years attests *first and foremost* to a large-scale transformation of the instruments of domination within the capitalist mode of production and that, as a consequence, this stress on the centrality of work in everyone's life operates in fact as a strategy of domination. To affirm that waged work can no longer be the foundation on which society is built, nor the central concern of people's lives, is to mount a challenge to the power both of companies and of the state. It is to remind ourselves, 'that it is absurd to call on individuals to serve society; society must have as its goal the free development of each and all' (Gorz, 1998). Thus, the last part of my exploration is based on the conviction that the only possible way out for us – a way out both liberating and democratic – lies in moving beyond the wage-based society.

But there are different opinions on how this will be achieved. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is not enough to promote increasing self-employment and freelance working arrangements, etc. This route simply leads to insecurity for all. Part III suggests a more radical, but liberating, strategy for moving beyond the wage-based society.

## 6. The multi-active worker or the end of salaried employment (liberal version)

Before introducing my vision for life beyond work, I would like to share my concerns about the way neo-liberal conceptions are already putting their stamp on representations of work and work practices. These proposals are moving towards reinforcing the workist paradigm and the personalisation of subjection condemned earlier. In recent years, aided by the very rapidity of current transformations, companies and salaried employment are disappearing as easily identifiable entities. The various strategies for the use of labour adopted by companies are blurring the traditional divide between employees and the self-employed (see Aubert-Monpeyssen, 1997:616–25). There is a paradoxical process at work in these transformations: the new contractual arrangements bring employees close to the traditional status of ‘freelancers’, but *at the same time* the independent aspect of self-employed status is losing its substance for both groups of workers. The employee sees himself increasingly granted scope for initiative and creativity; yet this is inseparable from an obligation to achieve results and, in some cases, from the risks of the activity being transferred onto the employee him/herself. On the other hand, many self-employed workers are only so in name, being dependent on the companies contracting them, both at the technical and economic levels, while also bearing the risks of their activity themselves. Thus there is an increasing tendency for companies to evade employing salaried workers.

Those on the right of the political spectrum might justify this trend by arguing that waged employment, with the constraints it implies on an ultra-competitive international scene, is an artificial construct that should be reformed to liberate employees’ creativity and freedom, both at company and individual level. Now, as I have repeatedly stressed, the stakes in this controversy over the ‘end of salaried employment’ are far from purely theoretical. To see the truth of this, one need only examine the construction of the figure of the self-employed worker by the liberal ideologues of post-wage-based society. In my view, the free-market liberal analyses embody the inversion of the representations of work that characterises our post-Taylorist age in its most extreme and dangerous version: the argument that work, which was once alienating and de-humanising, has now become liberating.

Taylorism has become a convenient foil in this argument, and, at the very moment when current practices are throwing more and more workers out of the economic and social circuit, the ideology of ‘new work’ re-connects, in a way, with the glorification of work that was prevalent in the nineteenth century. So, for example, these writers have no words too harsh to stigmatise the tendency of many individuals to wish to resist change.<sup>43</sup> If there still is determinism over the question of the future of work, it seems to me to lie, rather, with those who regard the market as humanity’s only horizon.<sup>44</sup>

### The self as enterprise: A euphemistic utilitarianism

The collective work *Le Travail au XXIème siècle*<sup>45</sup> analyses at length the transformations currently occurring in the labour market, characterised by the end of classical salaried employment and by the redeployment of jobs, creating a new breed of worker: a generation of ‘multi-active workers’ in a rapidly progressing service sector. Among other things, ‘Human work is an economic variable. It is a commodity like any other; the labour market is a real market in which private intermediations will play a growing role’ (Bühler and Ettighoffer:209) . In this case, the multi-active worker is quite simply a new product, adapted to the need for more fluid forms of work in a new international context. In the era of self-management one must, in order to earn one’s living, make the best of one’s skills by carrying out at the personal level a policy of ‘plural part-time’ work and personal incomes. Why, then, burden oneself and provide a collective framework for the reduction of working hours?!

It is easy to see that this kind of commoditisation of one’s time brings back in full force the basic insecurity the employees of the Fordist compromise believed had been entirely overcome. In a sense, with the ‘new work’, we see an unfolding of the dialectic of freedom and constraint within the two spheres, occupational and non-occupational: in the occupational sphere, the pursuit of excellence and greater competition, but also more freedom; an explosion of the scope for individual choice with the appearance of new technical objects, but also enslavement to the new

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43. ‘Destiny guides those who accept it, but drives from the field those who reject it’, asserts Bob Audrey, ‘L’entreprise individuelle ...’ (1996: 46). See also his *Le Travail après la crise* (1994).

44. I refer especially to thinking of an Anglo-American origin, the influence of which is far from negligible in France. See William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (1995); Harry S. Dent Jr., *Job Shock: Four New Principles Transforming our Work and Business* (1995); and Charles Handy, *The Empty Raincoat* (1994).

45. Eurotechnopolis Institute, *Le Travail au XXIème siècle* (1995). I centre my analysis on Chapter 10: ‘L’homme polyactif’ by Nicolas Bühler and Denis Ettighoffer. The consequences of such changes are, as we shall see, clearly indicated, but always without reservations.

information technologies, etc. But it is also clear that the contours of the future organisation of work contain at least as many risks of insecurity (pauperisation, disenfranchisement, etc.) as occupational and personal opportunities. The new self-employed – often self-employed against their own wishes – are indeed emblematic of the ‘mass vulnerability’ to which Robert Castel (2003) has drawn attention.

The scenario outlined above draws on the ‘eternal family’, which again becomes the ‘entrepreneurial unit of the self-manager’. ‘The family enterprise of the self-manager will be the work-unit and the unit for regulating the resources deriving from inheritance and work’ (Eurotechnopolis Institute, 1995:215). But how is it to be this haven of security when solidarities – including family solidarities – are crumbling and when the number of people living alone is on the increase? And which member(s) will be relied upon to supply free labour? Being less well paid in general than men, will it not be women who are condemned (as an act of good management!) to casual jobs and to taking on the work of reproduction within the family unit, thus enshrining women’s subordination in new work practices?

Thus under cover of greater autonomy and creativity, this version of the end of salaried employment will force everyone into entrepreneurship in the jungle of the new labour market and of aggravated international competition between net surfers. The libertarian myth has been warped into a liberal myth. In short, we shall see the perpetuation of the dual society we know already and insecurity for all; that is to say, more or less hazardous portfolio management for executives and the most highly qualified workers, and more or less subsidised casual work for those who ‘did not make the grade’.

In a context where insecurity is regarded as a virtue, this sale of self is theorised as such by the new liberals. The definition of a new model of work not based on salaried employment involves an extension of the notion of work to all forms of activity outside work, coupled with a conception of work in terms of enterprise. This means in effect that, ‘activity is conceived as entrepreneurial in its essence. Enterprise arises out of the individual and covers activity in all its forms: paid work, voluntary work for a charitable association, running the household, acquiring skills, developing a network of contacts, preparing a change of activity...’ (Méda, 1999:127). Thus, the economic meaning is colonising the general and older meaning of enterprise. To live one’s life at every moment of one’s working and free time is now to ‘manage oneself’, and the goal now offered to the worker-individual for conducting her/his existence is the model of enterprise. The search for meaning is closed. Whereas we had thought it wholly outmoded, the utilitarian principle has simply become less visible, but it now lies behind the demand to mobilise non-utilitarian elements (motivation,

commitment, etc.), as the productivist-functionalist model cracks under the strain of extra-utilitarian demands. In short, the utilitarian principle is spreading, but is doing so in euphemistic garb (on this trend see the insightful Caillé, 1989:49–52).

In order to re-establish entrepreneurial ideology, a skilful, yet perverse, manipulation of the themes currently under discussion and the present aspirations of individuals is being staged: these include the desire for autonomy, the search for meaning, ethical demands and, more generally, anti-economism (a non-economic conception of value, the re-embedding of the economic sphere, etc.). What we are seeing is a perversion of individuals' latent desires for autonomy and their increasing rejection of economism, for these aspirations have even become the basic lever for motivating workers. Thus, for example, the blurring of the work/life distinction, instead of bringing with it more autonomy and fulfilment, seems likely to lead to a total subjection of the individual to the imperatives of a 'total production of self'. This means that the central conflict has certainly been shifted onto new ground. The subjection of the producer and the consumer is now a subjection of the person, since 'The invasion of individuals' innermost capacities for self-determination foreshadows a dispossession that is even more total than the one they underwent as vendors of their labour power' (Gorz, 1999:135).

It is, in this regard, significant that the new entrepreneurial discourse of Bob Audrey,<sup>46</sup> consists of strategically stressing, primarily, the disadvantages of waged work, the vulnerability of employees in a market largely favourable to employers (in terms of hiring, pace of work, promotion and income); in a word, their 'lack of autonomy'. He proposes to justify work by giving it an ethical sense and he turns to Aristotle for the philosophical underpinning for the new definition he claims to provide for it, appealing to the thinking on happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. With the 'good life' requiring that an individual's activities are chosen for their own sake, Aristotle's contribution is useful in bringing a new understanding of value in terms of criteria that are no longer merely economic in nature. In the good life, virtues such as excellence, beauty, friendship, intelligence and wisdom are manifested. To apply this to modern society we must go beyond the strict field of economics. The value of work has to be extended to the field of social and personal values, and to become a question of human fulfilment simultaneously at the economic, social and ethical levels. Now, the 'new work' is seen to be the answer to this aspiration to happiness through personal fulfilment linked to the exercise of choice in the management of one's time (time being, first, as we have already seen, an issue of autonomy). Entrepreneurial work enables us, we are told, to organise our time by integrating into it very diverse

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46. Audrey has been one of the promoters of entrepreneurial values in France. See for instance Bob Audrey 'L'entreprise individuelle ...', (1996: 23–41).



activities, some of which embody social values. The overlap between work relations, family relations and relations of friendship is a source of increased satisfaction. Devoting time to a social activity raises the question of value defined by the individual and not by the market, according to Audrey. Even more importantly, entrepreneurial activity is almost similar to human development, the fundamental value of human fulfilment: 'You plan, you devise strategies, you calculate how to increase the value of work on the market, but the aim goes beyond mere income and includes the development of the whole person' (Audrey, 1994:30). A better counterfeiting of the Gorzian thesis on autonomy could not be found. In *Reclaiming Work*, Gorz points out that the freelance provider of services seemed to embody the only possible definition of humanity at the end of the capitalist twentieth century, human beings as 'working commodities', since these individuals 'are both their own fixed capital, the valorization of that capital by work, the commodity sold on the market and the promoters, by a carefully elaborated commercial strategy, of that commodity' (Gorz, 1999:43).

### The alternative management of a rare resource: Time

Through these arguments we are seeing the blurring of the division between working time and time outside work. This serves to justify the colonisation of daily life by economic logic. Even more than during the industrial era, time is managed according to the yardstick of maximum utility. The idea of a 'work portfolio', developed by the British guru Charles Handy in *The Age of Unreason* (1989), is often presented as the model of the future. Handy distinguishes between five types of activity/work (wage work, fee work, homework, gift work and study work) and calculates the time he spends on each. He advises couples to manage their portfolios – that is to say, their futures – together and to 'look at how to get the best out of their common happiness!' In highly imaged language, he creates a skilful blend of managerial considerations and ethical and philosophical precepts aimed at the multitudes of portfolio workers, and this culminates in a call for an ethical capitalism. Hence, for example, the new principle of constant improvement, expressed in the phrase 'change before it's too late'. In other words, begin a new upward curve before you've reached the top of the first one, by diversifying your activities and interests. What he fetchingly terms 'the discipline of the second curve' is an invitation to put into practice, in one's work and life, the principles of the new management.

We are, here again, confronted with a discourse of personal fulfilment that masks the constraints of an ultra-competitive, de-regulated labour market. That discourse even borrows from Hannah Arendt (1985): in the *vita active*, with the traditional demarcation line between the private and the work spheres having faded, people will

adopt a more holistic approach to work. When unscrambled, we can see here a confusion of ends and means that reaches its paroxysm in a discourse which, while stirring up the desire for meaning, creativity and autonomy, and praising the integration of private and working life, in reality allows utilitarianism to triumph with the concept of 'human capital'. We may consequently expect the development of new services to individuals to help them to develop their 'training capital' or 'cultural capital'. The idea of assigning responsibility for their employability to the workers themselves is well established in the United States and is now spreading in Europe.

As has already been mentioned, this type of apologetic discourse on current developments, which sees reconciliation between society and the market, between ethics and economics, within easy reach is, at the same time, a warning against the refusal to move with the times: 'Will life be better for us in the future? In many places in the world and many types of job we expect the future to bring happy days. But there will be pain for many of those who will have to adapt to an entrepreneurial society in which the individual regards his/her work as an enterprise. Nevertheless, such a society will be an ethical society in the true sense of the term, since *ethos* means way of living'.<sup>47</sup> There can be no doubt about it, the new work has here assumed a Messianic mission. And what is being offered to us is the reconciliation of market demands and personal exigencies, necessity and freedom or, to put it in Gorzian terms, functionality and subjectivity. Against such a scenario, one can only reassert that the freeing-up of time is the *sine qua non* of autonomy. This can only mean a genuine freeing-up of time: delivering individuals both from worries about tomorrow and from the subjection of their whole lives to the logic of profitability. This only makes sense in relation to the social *project* of which it is a part. 'When a society produces in order to provide work rather than works in order to produce, then work as a whole has no meaning' (Gorz, 1982:72): this formula seems to me to sum up perfectly the anti-workist, anti-productivist struggle that underlies the entire Green project.

In Part III set out some steps for helping this struggle to make progress towards reality.

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47. Bob Audrey, 'L'entreprise individuelle...', (1994: 40–41). We are certainly dealing here with the latest form of naturalisation of the market.

## PART 3

### An Eco-socialist Project for a Globalised World



## 7. Knowledge capitalism or society of culture?

### Introduction: The stakes of a politics of time

The consequences of the post-Fordist transformation of work and management practices described in the previous chapters, together with the new international division of labour, are devastating for most employees, small producers and self-employed workers. Generally, the new arrangements that characterise global capitalism mean a massive transfer from wages and the public purse to private investors. Transnational corporations (TNCs), through the medium of international institutions with questionable legitimacy and decision-making practices,<sup>49</sup> are energetically using a range of instruments to impose the freedom of the market over social and ecological imperatives. As a consequence, we are ‘the first generation to have to rethink the economic, social and environmental contracts on a truly global scale, by necessity and not by mere choice’ (Fabre, 2002).

What unites the richly diverse movement against neo-liberal globalisation is the awareness that, in order to resist the stranglehold of deterritorialised capital, the only way forward, for both rich and poor countries, is to reassert the primacy of the political against the dominance of economic imperatives. Many sections of this movement have suggested strategies to protect and nourish social relations free from the profit motive. I believe that we need to radically reassess the meaning and function of waged work. The ‘choice’ is between either a society within the narrow confines of productivism, or new forms of sociality for a multi-activity-based society.

A critical perspective on global capitalism reveals that it exercises its supremacy through the spread of relationships dominated by the logic of the market to an increasing number of areas of life. As we will see, it does so in two correlated ways: (1) the spread of the wage labour regime in its various forms, as well as (2) the appropriation of free resources, either by denying their contribution to the production of wealth or by commoditisation, i.e. the trading of goods that were previously free by imposing an artificial scarcity. Undermining this hegemonic thrust implies establishing a universal guaranteed income and securing a wide access to key public

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48. For an exploration of the power arrangements involved within and around the WTO see Agnès Bertrand and Laurence Kalafatides, *OMC, Le pouvoir invisible* (2002).

resources on the one hand, and the extension of social spaces devoted to activities other than work done out of sheer economic necessity on the other hand; in short, the spaces to develop activities, relationships and lifestyles outside the logic of the market. This final section will seek to establish that, although the experience of work and employment does vary greatly across the globe according to highly diverse socio-economic circumstances, these two measures are fully relevant; the stakes of a politics of time being ultimately identical in the age of global capitalism.

In France during the second half of the 1990s (when I wrote the first two sections of this book) a lively debate grew out of the feeling that, behind the symptom of chronic unemployment, lay what was termed a 'crisis of work'. The dominant role of paid work – both on a societal and on a personal level – became the object of critical examination, both within and outside academic circles. Sadly, today we are seeing the weakening of this debate. Even many radical critiques of the current employment policies fail to question the centrality of waged work. Moreover, alternative proposals, centred on Keynesian policies to stimulate growth and redistribute wealth, fail to take fully into account the need to protect existential autonomy, the self-determination and satisfaction of needs, and lived solidarity, as opposed to the abstract solidarity of the state. As I explain next, in France, the mandatory reduction of working hours, along with the main thrust of employment and welfare policies, fell significantly short of truly liberating time for all. This is why, in my view, we must embed any argument for liberating time in a critical perspective against global capitalism.

### Mass vulnerability, the French version

In the current European context, France is notable for what seems a brave piece of legislation – the Aubry laws – which makes compulsory a collective reduction of the working week from 39 to 35 hours.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, what should have been an emblematic reform of the left in power has been qualified as one item in 'the long list of mishaps of social history' (Bulard, 2002: 33). The idea proved immensely popular, and to many employees who have enjoyed the benefits of increased disposable time (even those who had to endure the intensification of the pace of work as a result), the prospect of a return to the previous regime would be unthinkable. However, the 35-hour week can also be read as a missed opportunity.

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49. Named after Martin Aubry, Minister for Work, Employment and Solidarity, the two laws, passed on 13/6/98 and 19/1/2000, provided the legislative framework and the incentives for management and workers' representatives to reach an agreement, at company or professional branch level, on the reduction of working hours to no more than 35 hours a week on average per year. For a mainly favourable, yet honest and comprehensive assessment of their impact, see Bernard Bruhnes, Denis Clerc, Dominique Méda, and Bernard Perret, *35 heures: le temps du bilan* (2001).

First, the heterogeneity of forms of employment and activities has not been taken into account as the reform only applied to the most stable section of the working population in full-time employment; the growing numbers of part-timers, workers on casual labour contracts, self-employed, as well as the employees of many small and medium-sized enterprises were excluded.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, and most importantly, the Aubry laws have dramatically extended the scope for employers to negotiate flexible working arrangements with their workers. In the absence of a clear state commitment to a societal choice in favour of truly liberated time, they were open to be used, and have in many cases been used, as a management tool, dispossessing many workers of their own time as a result. Consequently, the reorganisation of working patterns, which was coupled with the reduction of working hours, has only benefited employees in the most protected work environments (organised unions mainly in big companies, workers with strong bargaining power, or enlightened management), whereas the less qualified workforce has borne the brunt of increased flexibility. The latter have lost out financially because of agreements on wage moderation or even wage reduction and loss of overtime, without actually reaping the rewards of increased free time. For them, the previous pattern of imposed flexibility has only been worsened by this reform.

In conclusion, while the 35-hour week has proved to be a cost-effective boost to efficiency and flexibility for many businesses, its implementation has tightened the grip of work on people's lives for whole sections of French society. Now, as before, there is widespread job insecurity for all but the pool of workers in high demand as the polarisation of the labour force has not been altered (by this reform or others): there is instead a shrinking core and a growing mass of marginalised and insecure (non-) workers forming outer layers of increasingly casual labour. Whereas an equitable sharing of working hours amongst all would have undermined people's willingness to devote their life to the company, their concentration on the 'privileged' is used to 'motivate' both core and peripheral employees.

For these peripheral, yet essential workers, there is a fundamental way in which the frontier between employment and unemployment has become porous: while disappearing from the official statistics, some unemployment is integrated in 'flexible' production. Forms of employment, together with forms of unemployment, have evolved so that a restrictive definition of unemployment is no longer appropriate to a range of hybrid status individuals. The last decade has seen the emergence of a new

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50. Small businesses which have not yet signed agreements are most likely never to do so with the coming to power in 2002 of a right-wing majority under the leadership of Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Without (yet) daring to repeal the Aubry laws, the incentives for companies to negotiate further agreements has effectively been removed by the passing of a law in August 2003 that drops the obligation to negotiate a reduction of working hours as a condition to benefit from a lowering of social contributions by employers.

entity: the unemployed worker. In order for unemployment figures to be accurate, it is therefore legitimate to consider 'a pool of workers affected by unemployment to a lesser or higher degree and/or suffering the consequences of the degradation of their working conditions' and, on this basis, I put forward an inclusive figure of 16.3 per cent (but 12.8 per cent for men and 20.5 per cent for women) (after Maruani, 2003).

Evidence suggests that this separation of the labour market into the minority of relatively protected workers and the many in insecure employment is an attempt to destroy the industrial relations arrangements of the Fordist period that led to the crisis of governability and the erosion of the rate of profit for employers in the late 1970s. In the name of competition, the patiently constructed edifice of labour law is either being dismantled or ignored. Successive French governments over the last twenty years have consistently endeavoured to reduce 'excessive' labour costs, including by generously subsidising low-skilled jobs.<sup>51</sup> This is consistent with France coming into line with European Union policies aimed at wage moderation. As a result, the share of companies' added value allocated to wages continued to decline: from 69 per cent in 1983 to 60 per cent today.<sup>52</sup> These policies, coupled with the downward pressure of mass unemployment on wages, explain the rise in low-paid jobs and the trend towards greater social inequality.<sup>53</sup>

The new wage regime in France, as in other industrialised countries, is therefore characterised not only by a de-linking between wage levels and the cost of living, in keeping with anti-inflationist imperatives, but also by a weakening of employment standards and a degradation of working conditions concomitant with a strengthening of the compulsion to work by a benefit system increasingly thought of as a minimal safety net.

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51. To its credit, the previous Jospin government (1997–2002), a Socialist–Green–Communist coalition, took a number of progressive social measures such as new jobs for young people in the public and not-for-profit sectors (*Emplois Jeunes*), the extension of health insurance cover to people on very low incomes (*Couverture Maladie Universelle*), and stricter control of collective redundancies. It nonetheless subscribed to the neo-liberal explanation of unemployment and implemented employment policies designed to remove the 'rigidities' in the labour market that, according to neo-liberal theory, generate an increasing imbalance between supply and demand. The underlying causes of the inequitable sharing of paid work and wealth, and of the imbalance of power in the management–worker relationship, have not been addressed. In this respect, the position of the current right-wing majority and Raffarin government does not strictly speaking constitute a break with the Jospin policies, as some have observed, but rather a radicalisation to the right.

52. Coutrot and Husson (2002:121). Martine Bulard quotes the following figures but without indicating her sources: from 68 per cent in 1980 to 54 per cent in 2000, in 'Menace sur les 35 heures' (2002:35).

53. The French version of the American and British *working poor* means that work and income have already been largely uncoupled in a dramatic rather than in an emancipatory way. One French employee out of six now earns an income below the official minimum wage. At the same time, the fiscal system shows a weakening of redistribution through taxation. For a recent review of the situation, see Pierre Concialdi, 'L'installation dans le chômage de masse' and Ferrandon Benoît, 'Inégalités économiques: état des lieux' in *Cahiers Français*, 311, 2002, p.69–74 and p.88–93 respectively.



The mainstream liberal discourse insists that each individual is entirely responsible for her or his own welfare. It also supports instilling in every individual – child or adult, worker or jobless, rich and poor – the entrepreneurial attitude that capitalism so desperately needs in order to undermine wage labour relations. Both right and left are aiming to reduce the sphere of benefits, divide the unemployed between the deserving and the scroungers (see Nikonoff, 2002:37–39), and multiply the incentives to accept any job. Hence the major function of the PARE (*Plan d'Aide au Retour à l'Emploi*), the convention governing the allocation of unemployment benefits that has been in force since July 2001, is to reinforce the conditional nature of this benefit. Its contractual nature is obviously a clear turn towards workfare policies (Villiers, 2003:110–14). The PPE (*Prime Pour l'Emploi*), passed in the same year by the Jospin government and extended by the present Raffarin government, has been set up officially as a means to encourage people on benefits to return to employment as it is designed to complement income that is too low to make it worthwhile to enter employment. Like other forms of financial support for the low waged – whether low employers' social contributions or income supplements for employees – these measures consolidate poor employment norms on the job market, as well as the reserve army of labour that the companies need to rely on. This trend is further reinforced by the recent setting up by the current government of the RMA (*Revenu Minimum d'Activité*) which clearly takes a step further towards undermining the official minimum wage: in the case of the long-term unemployed in receipt of job seeker's allowance, employers will now only have to pay them a top-up when they employ them, as they will continue to receive their benefit too.<sup>54</sup>

These measures furthering 'flexibility' are the logical development of policies that reduce labour to a mere commodity. By overlooking the politics of time they reinforce the oppressive centrality of wage labour. But we must expand this analysis if we are to understand the workings of this post-Fordist extreme flexibility in the context of the transformation of capitalism.

## Putting life to work

A number of forward thinking analysts have convincingly argued that humanity is in the process of leaving the Neolithic period, a period when economic development

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54. The unemployed who do not have access to unemployment benefit are at the time of writing (April 2004) awarded an income-based job seeker's allowance, the RMI (*Revenu Minimum d'Insertion*), of €417.88 per month. From now on, people who have been unemployed for one year will be 'encouraged' to take up a part-time job whose remuneration, the RMA (*Revenu Minimum d'Activité*), will be made up of €417.88 plus the employer's contribution of about €140. This means that the employer will in effect be able to hire labour for a net cost of less than €2 per hour, as they will not have to pay social contributions. No social contribution paid by either party also means no subsequent right to a range of social benefits such as unemployment benefit, pension, etc.

was driven by energy-based forces, to enter a phase in which it is now determined by information (see the seminal works of Passet (1996) and Robin (1989)). It has been suggested that activities carried out in 'the immaterial economy' – sectors such as media, advertising and marketing, research, culture and design – now represent the determining factors behind the production of value. In particular, authors situated in the Italian tradition of non-orthodox Marxism<sup>55</sup> view the massive expansion of the immaterial sector of the economy in the light of Marx's intuition that, in the future, wealth creation will result from a collective knowledge and intelligence, the general intellect, produced by autonomous and highly skilled workers. For these authors, the shift from the Fordist to the post-Fordist labour regime amounts to no less than a change of paradigm: from industrial capitalism to 'cognitive capitalism',<sup>56</sup> also called 'informational capitalism', in which material, fixed capital is progressively superseded by immaterial or 'human capital'.

The tasks involved in the above-mentioned industries are indeed largely impossible to prescribe, but imply co-operation and innovation on the part of the operators; a far cry from the work in Fordist organisations against which so many workers rebelled in the 1960s and 1970s. This means that, through the new intellectual, communicative forms of labour, contemporary capitalism has turned to its advantage the wide-scale rejection of the Taylorist forms of workers' dispossession and the claim for autonomy at work.<sup>57</sup>

André Gorz has taken issue with the scientism inherent in the widely used term 'knowledge economy', which should in his view be termed 'intelligence society'.<sup>58</sup> This is because the main productive force of the immaterial economy is not to be understood as mere general scientific and technological knowledge (although it is that too), objectified in machines and expressed as formalised and codified procedures, referred to as the information revolution. The main force is the *human* intelligence which, in Marx's terms, turns 'man into the most precious capital'. This capital lies for instance in the workers' ability to use their cognitive skills, their critical judgement, their intuition or imagination, to successfully operate complex productive systems. It

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55. Grouped in France around the journals *Futur Antérieur* headed by Toni Negri and Jean-Marie Vincent, now discontinued, the stimulating but short-lived *Alice*, and recently *Multitudes*, edited by Yann Moulier-Boutang. On the defining concepts and the relevance of Italian Marxism to contemporary capitalism, see Finn Bowring, 'From the Mass Worker to the Multitude: A Theoretical Contextualisation of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*', in *Capital & Class* (forthcoming).

56. Corsani (2001:173). The best synthesis of the current debates around the continuity or discontinuities with the industrial capitalism model is to be found in the volume edited by Carolo Vercellone, *Sommes-nous sortis du capitalisme industriel?* (2003).

57. An adaptation to the counter-revolution of the 1960s analysed by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello in *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (1999).

58. The following developments are based on the first three sections of André Gorz's latest book: *L'Immatériel. Connaissance, valeur et capital* (2003).

would be mistaken to consider that this only applies to leading sectors of the service industry. Behavioural skills such as versatility, presentation or negotiation skills which can be neither stored nor quantified are becoming a key to even low-paid jobs in the service sector. Moreover, information technologies have transformed much industrial work into the management of an uninterrupted stream of information, which requires communication and co-operation. In many situations tasks cannot therefore be prescribed because they rely on communicative competence on the part of the service provider.

André Gorz writes: ‘What companies consider to be ‘their’ human capital is therefore a free resource [...], which has generated itself and keeps doing so, and whose capacity to produce itself companies are only capturing and channelling’ (2003:19). In this respect, indirect labour – as opposed to direct labour, which is visible because it is recorded (often in hours worked) and remunerated – is increasingly the determining factor in the creation of wealth. The global production process begins outside the company and outside the market, thus making the Fordist distinction between leisure or non-productive and work time increasingly irrelevant. ‘Work directly on production is now merely one aspect amongst others of the worker’s labour’ (Gorz, 1999:31). Or, as Yann Moulier-Boutang puts it, the *invisible and unpaid work* that takes place in the initial stages, and after what traditional political economy considers to be productive work, is increasingly the main source of economic value (Moulier-Boutang, 2001:25).

Another important aspect is the cultural significance of this metamorphosis of capitalism. Because, most importantly, ‘this immaterial work [...] rests upon expressive and co-operative capacities which cannot be taught, upon an ability to promptly mobilise a range of knowledge which is part of vernacular culture’ (Gorz, 2003:16–17). Post-Fordist workers bring with them abilities developed outside work, nurtured through games, sports, cultural pursuits, personal interaction, formal but also informal education and shared understanding. In other words, their social and emotional competence is the product of socialisation through a culture. In this sense, immaterial labour is identical, André Gorz explains, to the production of the self in the context of a *shared culture*; the new capital is social in essence, lived experience and living knowledge. He then invites us to draw the lessons from this for a radical and anti-productivist perspective on contemporary global capitalism, for proposals for a global *Kultargesellschaft*, as opposed to an *Arbeitsgesellschaft* (see the section in Chapter 3 called ‘In defence of socialist politics’). In the information age, new forms of intellectual property based on patenting and an extension of copyright laws, whose function is to introduce an artificial scarcity, ensure that natural resources together with community knowledge and traditions can be privatised and traded; in other

words, appropriated and exploited. The conflict unfolding between immaterial capital and protagonists of the movement against neo-liberal globalisation, opponents of the new enclosures, is therefore about control over the public sphere, collective goods and a universal access to shared knowledge and culture.

Another facet of this predatory character of capitalism is its inability to integrate non-economic values into the production of value. In particular, both the feminist and ecologist movements have claimed that 'capitalism exploits more work and production relations than just wage labour relations' (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies, 1999:11), in the shape of domestic and shadow work done by women or the maintenance of natural resources by peasants, for instance. The appropriation of the more tangible elements of natural and cultural heritage, such as traditional medicinal or agricultural knowledge, has recently been the subject of widespread criticism. Extending this appropriation through the immaterial economy to the individual's own cognitive, communicative and effective resources risks converting life itself into a commodity: everyday life is literally 'put to work' and subjected to the law of value in its entirety. This implies that a questioning of the new labour regime must be part of the anti-globalisation agenda.

This questioning requires us to clarify the meaning of culture and wealth. The recognition that direct labour is not the exclusive source of value supports the call for a new theory of value. One must remember that all knowledge is wealth before it is turned into a source of monetary value, and that 'to be put to work is neither the first nor the exclusive destination of knowledge' (Gorz, 2003:77). All knowledge, before it is instrumentalised, is first and foremost oriented towards the search for truth. Earlier (chapter 2) I described heteronomy as loss of meaning and a threat to culture, defined as the result of the ability to act, to produce and give meaning. Productivism can now be defined as the reduction of human intelligence and living culture to their productive function. From this, we can understand that the aim of socialism is more than ever the fostering of human and cultural development, to which the search for optimum performance must give way.

### Arguments for a guaranteed income

I have argued that work no longer represents the main productive force. *Direct* working time is increasingly negligible compared with the time spent developing the skills required in the new immaterial economy. In post-industrial societies, simple, abstract work (work dissociable from the person) is being replaced by complex work which is more difficult to measure. It is easy to see why the source of value can less and less be related to identifiable, *individual* labour which forms the basis of a

worker's remuneration. Persisting in doing so inevitably means that the income allocated for consumption declines dramatically while the volume of commodities expands by a similar order of magnitude. Knowledge, codified in the shape of software, can organise production, rendering direct work obsolete. This leads either to unemployment and mass vulnerability or to abundance, depending on whether the wealth produced is distributed in smaller and smaller quantities as a wage or shared as an income, according to André Gorz. It is undoubtedly the former which is occurring: the extraordinary growth in financial capital demonstrates that the reduction in production costs has translated into increased dividends and profits, but smaller wages.

Instead, an optimal distribution of income should be based on the wealth produced rather than the volume of work recorded. It should be guaranteed to all in order to free people's dependence on steady jobs which, in any case, are becoming scarcer. Promoting a guaranteed income does not amount to a policy designed to eradicate poverty but rather rests on a vision of the common good founded on a wider and more radical ambition, according to Maurizio Lazzarato.<sup>59</sup> André Gorz agrees there is a political and an economic justification for the guaranteed income; it is ultimately about sharing wealth and giving it a meaning beyond the economic one. A guaranteed income, or social wage, 'should not be thought of as a remuneration or a reward for wealth creation; it must be what fosters the development of activities which *are* wealth and represent an end in themselves' (2003:103).<sup>60</sup> Not intended as a remuneration proportional to direct working time, it would result in self-production and self-development regardless of whether it is needed by the economic machine.

Implementing the most radical proposals of guaranteed income, characterised by a high degree of unconditionality, would undoubtedly be a gradual and long-term process and would have to match the particular contexts in which they are being introduced. Nonetheless, aiming for an unconditional income would everywhere signal the determination to reassert the primacy of the political over economics, and offer a vision by which to guide action. Reforms should support the move from an income whose function is compensatory, to an income freeing the individual from their dependence on corporations, loosening the grip of 'workism', enabling them to resist the trend towards the commoditisation of their whole life, and recovering personal autonomy through the 'de-marketisation' of some activities. In the French context, such measures would help to re-establish the welfare system on new

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59. As Maurizio Lazzarato puts it, although currently hegemonic, the work-centred political discourse, based on a reductive and outdated concept of labour, is no longer in phase with the current transformations of capitalism. The exhaustion of our political imagination is encapsulated in the slogan 'a job for everyone' (Lazzarato, 2002:15–16).

60. Gorz, André, *L'Immatériel*, p.103.

foundations. One step would be to increase social benefits for the jobless (so far left deliberately low so as not to act as a disincentive to the worst jobs being taken) instead of reducing tax and subsidising employers to reduce labour costs and generally remunerating capital. Legislative changes and financial measures could support people's genuine right to work intermittently while benefiting from continued income.

If the current section is to deliver the promise of its title, namely 'an eco-socialist project for a globalised world', we also need to focus the discussion on possible paths of resistance to the insecurities of wage labour for the many countries unlike France. This is what the final two chapters explore. For countries in the South, the provision of a guaranteed income and other means to material security, against the generalisation of insecurity worldwide, would have to reflect particular local circumstances. Therefore, I will first seek to establish the clearest possible picture of the global world of work, and the specific issues facing countries in the South, before addressing the implementation of forms of guaranteed income and material security specific to these countries.

## 8. The new world of work

### The abolition of wage labour

We now possess all the elements we need to map out the ways in which the latest metamorphosis of capitalism has altered the nature of work. To briefly recap, the labour regime is currently undergoing a process of radical transformation. The Fordist style labour relationship is progressively giving way to minimal relationships, stripped of the protections that had been enshrined in law in the post-war period. This trend can in some cases lead to the formal dissolution of the employment relationship as it is replaced by a commercial agreement between a company and a ‘self-employed’ individual. The promotion of self-employment and the widespread use of outsourcing free the employer turned contractor from social insurance contributions – including redundancy, minimum wage and holiday pay.

The new immaterial sector where, as we have seen, we leave the realm of abstract labour and its emancipatory function, offers a vivid illustration of this process. Thus, for tasks that cannot easily be prescribed, performance depends upon the motivation of the subject at work. More than any other economy before, the immaterial economy requires the total mobilisation of the worker’s personality, and the self-prescription that we described in chapter 6. As such, the traditional wage labour relationship proves ill suited to this new capitalism, Gorz observes, and the commitment to self-production is best obtained by turning waged workers into self-entrepreneurs: ‘The person must treat herself as an enterprise [...], forced to impose on herself the constraints necessary to ensure the viability and competitiveness of *the enterprise that she is*. In short, wage labour must be abolished’ (Gorz, 2003:24–25).

Let us anticipate a legitimate objection here. The fact that, far from representing a residual category, blue-collar type jobs occupy about 25 per cent of the French workforce, and that many tasks in the service sector have undergone a ‘Taylorisation’ process, does not invalidate this analysis. We must stress that this trend towards a fully ‘flexible workforce’ through outsourcing and organised competition affects all sectors of the economy and all workers: peripheral employees but also core employees turned into entrepreneurs as well as profit centres competing against one another. Whether formalised as a commercial relationship for the so-called ‘self-

employed' (in reality, dependent upon the main players in a given trade) or not, this entrepreneurial attitude towards one's existence increasingly applies to both the 'employed' and the 'unemployed': in turn overworked and unemployed, all are ultimately responsible for the updating of their skills and the maintenance of their employability (if necessary helped along by workfare policies!) in order to survive in the new flexible labour market. On the part of the insecure person, this maintenance requires an uninterrupted commitment to work – i.e. to self-production as a potential service provider or employee. She/he therefore 'works' at all times.

Generally, in the liberal version of the end of wage labour, the return to mass vulnerability is clearly related to the general trend towards establishing contractual relationships – the service provider model – in preference to legal relationships codified in labour law. In many cases, the labour relationship approaches the ideal of the pure, unhindered commodity relationship. By using different contractual arrangements, capital is a predator in the sense that it is looking to not remunerate and, in many cases, to not recognise some essential ingredients in the production of value, a production which demands the exploitation of the individual's entire existence.

It is in this sense that *wage labour is being abolished when at the same time the heteronomy of the wage labour regime or the labour mode of production is becoming more pervasive*. Exploitation must therefore be understood in its wider sense, beyond the traditional forms of wage labour exploitation. Because wage labour is being abolished in the most regressive fashion, the historical claim by the labour movement of an emancipatory, progressive, abolition of wage labour is more than ever relevant; it only has to be widened to encompass new forms of labour relationships.

## The international division of labour

The transformations in the economy sketched out so far rest on the hypothesis that non-traditional or non-wage labour relationships are likely to represent an increasingly central category of the labour market in the future.<sup>61</sup> There is however an important objection to the cognitive capitalism thesis that needs to be addressed: How does this argument fit with the global and rapid spread of wage labour in the newly industrialised countries which display forms of labour organisation far removed from the productive and social networks of the self-employed in the immaterial sector?

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61. Work consisting of self-employment, activities of service providers, atypical forms of work; in short, a variety of dependent and non-dependent forms of work as described by Andréa Fumagali in 'Reconfiguration du marché du travail et travail indépendant', in Christian Azais, Antonella Corsani and Patrick Dieuaide, *Vers un capitalisme cognitif (Entre Mutations du travail et territoires)* (2001:115).



Isn't it the case that forms of labour organisation experienced by the new working classes in Asia or in the special economic zones of Latin America and China, for instance, indicate a trend towards a consolidation rather than dissolution of the traditional wage labour relationship?

It is true to say that most of the excellent literature on immaterial capitalism has obviously been written with reference to the old industrialised nations evolving towards post-industrial societies, and to answer preoccupations regarding work, employment and welfare in the North. So far, the concomitance between modes of labour organisation characteristic of post-Fordist capitalism and previous forms of labour mobilisation, including wage labour, has received insufficient attention; I too am guilty of an essentially Western bias.

As a result, different analyses of contemporary capitalism developed from different vantage points may wrongly be perceived as irreconcilable; analyses of actual trends in international labour may be deemed contradictory, some observers claiming that wage labour is expanding, others diagnosing the end of wage labour. We therefore need a fuller account of the diversity of mediations of the capital labour relationship offered by the different systems of organisation of individuals' work worldwide. While unqualified to provide such a comprehensive account, I would like to briefly outline their functional relationship.

André Gorz (2003:17) writes: 'The provision of services, immaterial labour, becomes the hegemonic form of labour, material labour is relegated to the periphery of the production process or simply outsourced'. To grasp the exact nature of this dominance, we must once again appreciate the complexity of our transitional period. Although it is unquestionably *growing quantitatively* worldwide, industrial work now represents but one of the forms of productive labour. In addition, while wage labour remains *numerically* the dominant mode of productivity mobilisation, it has been fragmented into a multiplicity of forms (my emphasis, Corsani and Lazzarato, 2002:179–80). In fact, the coexistence of different modes of production, with their corresponding labour forms, is yet another expression of the metamorphosis of capitalism. To state, in André Gorz's terms, that work 'in its immediate form' for material production is progressively taken over by 'immaterial work' which can no longer be measured with the instruments provided by political economy, is to point out that the former, although indispensable and quantitatively more significant, is not a reliable indicator of the wealth created and is increasingly subordinate to the latter in the production process.

In other words, *several modes of labour mobilisation, with their specific form of exploitation, function as a coherent system on a global scale.* The current dispersion

of production sites at a global level signals an exodus of capital outside its national boundaries, through mechanisms such as franchising and sub-contracting, in order to recover its freedom of action. This has undoubtedly led to a functional interdependence of the world's regions, including the under-developed, and a new international division of labour and productive processes. Crucial functions such as finance, design, marketing and other high value-added services remain essentially the prerogative of the richest nations. Take, for example, the high price set for a product – say a pair of trainers – made in China and bought in Europe for its symbolic value as an identity provider. Branding, protecting the 'invention' by imposing a monopoly and franchising, becomes a key operation in the production of value while its material production has been abandoned to sub-contractors forced to compete on a global level. In this context, the maximum exploitation of their workforce by subcontractors in industrialised and, increasingly, developing countries, produces the *précaire*, a French term for the insecure worker, in the North or, as we will see, the destitute migrant to zones of economic growth in the South. Both are figures of the relegation of material production.

We can therefore maintain that work, which we have defined in its modern sense as a wage labour relationship (*rapport social*) (see the section on 'From the centrality of non-work to the non-centrality of work' in Chapter 5) implying market exchange and efficiency, is undoubtedly spreading. Yet simultaneously it is being abolished; as the Fordist-style contract is being undermined nineteenth century conditions are being experienced by many workers, and new ways of putting life to work are designed. To this range we must add pockets of bonded labour, such as prison labour; child labour, including the sale of young people for prostitution; and illegal immigrants in debt (in near bondage?) to the mafia networks that have organised their migration. Carlo Vercellone (2002:11–21) sums up the current transformations: the present international division of work which marks the transition from industrial capitalism to cognitive capitalism combines closely traditional forms of exploitation, the commoditisation of life and the economisation of all aspects of human existence.

## Employment in the South and elsewhere

I will now examine in more detail the implications for a radical critique of work of this global domination of the labour mode of production by addressing the choices facing newly industrialised countries.

Many countries in the so-called Third World have indeed achieved what development economists consider to be a degree of diversification of their economic activities, and at first glance some of these countries are even making great strides towards our form

of society because of rapid economic expansion. There is evidence of the formation of a transnational working class – mainly women – and of huge increases in the global labour force, in China, India and Indonesia in particular.

It is to be noted, however, that the rise of the global market has exacerbated the plight of women who represent the majority of cheap labour employed in export-oriented industries worldwide. In addition, the pattern of industrial development has not only been very uneven between countries, it has also failed to keep pace with the high rates of population growth and migration towards the big conurbations. The phenomenon of growth without employment – or ‘jobless growth’ – has exposed the failure of the long-term development strategy of modern sector industrialisation.<sup>62</sup> As this sector fails to absorb the unemployed and underemployed it is now indisputable that rural–urban migration is producing a chronic and rising surplus of labour. The mechanisms at play are most apparent in China, a part of the world deemed an economic success by market enthusiasts, but where ‘the same market forces that are generating China’s ‘zooming growth’ are also producing the largest pool of unemployed workers in human history’ (Smith, 1997:6).

Under such circumstances, it is impossible to clearly differentiate employment, unemployment and underemployment: the enormous marginal population in Third World cities moves between these positions in a state of permanent poverty, forming a reserve army of labour. We are thus faced with a system generating formal employment as well as unemployment and deprivation *as part of the same process on a global scale*. Official high unemployment figures indicate a high level of informal activity, including prostitution and drug trafficking, where no benefits system exists. Population surplus had been partly absorbed by an important service sector providing formal employment in public infrastructures (transport, communication, public utilities) until the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank imposed structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s. The contraction of this sector has since been compensated for by the development of informal activities, a sector where women are markedly concentrated. This sector is characterised by labour-intensive small-scale enterprises, often using self-employed or family labour. The post-Fordist organisation of labour increasingly means that TNCs sub-contract some of their production to this sector too.

In conclusion, there is a strikingly similar trend between First and Third World, albeit under different local circumstances. Globally, the oppressive centrality of waged work in short supply means that ‘In nearly every country in the world there is now a labour

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62. A strategy whose basic tenets are: urban bias, imported capital-intensive technology, the involvement of large corporations, high productivity and wages, and subsidised infrastructure geared towards large-scale centralised and export-oriented production and distribution systems.

surplus, and those lucky enough to have jobs are increasingly members of a contingent work force without either security or benefits' (Korten, 2001:43). There is now ample evidence that globalisation is not associated with reduced income inequalities between North and South, but with rising income inequalities within rich and poorer countries alike, as only a small number of geographical enclaves benefit. At the same time, non-standard employment, which is often unprotected, has increased worldwide since the early 1990s (Torres, 2001:35), and the maximisation of short-term returns to shareholders demands that corporations restructure their operations (outsourcing, delocalisation, labour import and free-trade zones), in the process putting workers in competition with one another on a global scale.

Contrary to the Fordist period when profit margins were eaten up by the increase in wages, profit generation is again possible at much lower labour costs. Worldwide, capital is increasingly remunerated at the expense of labour and social welfare systems. Drawing attention to what amounts to engineering social disintegration, André Gorz has pointed out that the conditions for the Fordist type of growth, known to us since the end of World War II, will not be reproduced: the low wages paid to keep the lowest production costs mean insufficient purchasing power. 'As a consequence, there is no reasonable prospect of a sufficient and regular income for a very significant proportion of the newcomers to the wage-based society. We are globally entering a new era of mass vulnerability, vagrancy, social dislocation and misery akin to eighteenth century capitalism, as a result of capitalism overcoming the Fordist model. The material and cultural reproduction of societies has come into crisis' (Gorz, 1999)

The truth is that the hegemony of the wage labour regime means that the vast majority of people in the North and increasing numbers in the South depend on wage labour for their living *but can rely on it less and less*. It is equally important to realise that it is not only pauperisation that is at the heart of the global economy, but also a loss of autonomy by individuals and communities in the form of an increased dependency on the global market for their most vital functions: satisfying needs (production and consumption), building social bonds and creating culture. In this respect, the condition of educated urban youth in casual employment in the service sector and the condition of rural folks toiling long hours for a meagre subsistence on cash crops cheaply sold are but two faces of an identical process of dispossession.

## 9. Autonomy for all

### Resist the domination of the labour mode of production

Historically, progress has meant the uninterrupted exodus from country to city, first throughout Europe and today in the South, where landless peasants became city dwellers. Today as before, the fundamental problem is that those most affected have no say over the *direction*, the *pace* and, most importantly, the *rationale* behind the wide-scale changes currently taking place. In the rush towards globalisation, people in many countries of the South are being forced out of a land-based and yet sustainable economy, and into harsh competition for urban jobs in very short supply. The Beijing government itself has estimated that 140 million peasants will be forced into the cities as a result of China's membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Bertrand and Kalafatides, 2002:286). The authorities of Andhra Pradesh, the biggest state in India, are planning to remove some 30 out of 70 million small farmers to urban centres over the next 25 years to make way for industrial and export-oriented agriculture (Pimbert and Wakeford, 2002).

What will be the dire implications of policies aiming at moving millions of peasants out of agriculture and into overburdened cities, according to a narrow and economistic definition of efficiency? Shouldn't we pause and consider whether a wage-based society represents a valid model for humanity?

In my view, it is not enough to state that: 'While the battle for a radical reduction in working hours continues, the major objective remains full employment across the world and on a world level' (Aguiton et al., 2001:66) without prior evaluation of what 'full employment' would actually mean. Intelligent advocates of a globalisation with a different face have posited a number of valid alternatives to liberal globalisation. It is a globalisation based upon ecologically sound and culturally sustainable principles for rural and city development. I maintain that the resistance to the rise of the wage labour regime as the dominant means of access to resources, self-actualisation and full citizenship, both in the South and the North, represents an essential condition for the success of such an alternative scenario. It will mean resisting the wage labour regime as the main form of work organisation in the North and as forced proletarianisation in the South.

Amartya Sen rightly points out that ‘the rejection of the freedom to participate in the labour market is one of the ways of keeping people in bondage and captivity’ (Sen, 1999:6–7). In Asia and Africa, families of labourers ‘tied’ to the land are persistently denied the basic right to seek waged employment freely and women’s right to employment outside the family is denied in many cases. It is true that the development of capitalism has meant the progressive replacement of bonded or forced labour, characteristic of traditional systems, by work contracts and free movement. Contracts are liberating in the sense that they protect the individual from unwanted social and personal relationships, although the essential ambiguity of this new freedom should always be kept in mind (see the section ‘Accept the paradoxical nature of waged work today’ in Chapter 5). Furthermore, contrary to the liberal concept of freedom – free choice – a truly socialist approach puts the emphasis on the conditions of choice and the preservation of individual and collective autonomy. Work as an activity aimed at market exchange clearly has a place – both on a macro-economic level and as an option for individuals – but its dominance and imposition as the sole alternative must be refused for society’s sake if the ideals of modernity are to lead to emancipation.

Karl Polanyi has shown that the recent hegemony of the market is the last historical stage in the ‘disembedding’ of the economy from its social context which started in the eighteenth century, and which is leading to the total economisation of the world.<sup>63</sup> Against the world leaders’ proposition that market exchange should become the only foundation of social bonds, one should remember that a great number of different kinds of exchange relationships have existed and still exist both outside the market and in conjunction with it.

### Reclaim the power to make history

The ultimate purpose of the resistance to the hegemony of the labour mode of production is to foster the development of autonomous activities outside the waged economy and unmediated by the market. I refuse to accept that history will be written by the new and powerful globalisation forces. Reversing the trend towards a wage-based world means neither imposing ready-made models and ‘development’ strategies, nor turning the clock back to a village economy. It means revitalising democracy and in particular promoting the conditions conducive to debates over production and consumption models.

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63. (Latouche (2001). Serge Latouche rightly emphasises that an alternative to liberal globalisation will mean the construction of a new modernity based upon a critical assessment but not its negation, and will result from historical process, political in nature, more than technocratic action.

These conditions include an appropriate political and legal framework; but the creation of new instruments for the regulation of the economy will only succeed if propelled by social forces and supported by an evolution in mentalities. To facilitate this evolution, we must, to use André Gorz's phrase, 'unfetter the imagination' through the freeing up of time from capitalist logic in order to develop innovative experiences and forms of resistance. 'We have to widen as far as possible the gap between society and capitalism, that is to say, to increase the spaces and resources which enable alternative socialities to be produced, which allow modes of life, co-operation and activities to emerge that lie outside the power apparatus of capital and the state. In other words, we have to maximise the number of paths "out of capital"' (Gorz, 1999:78–79).<sup>64</sup> Already, the current experiments in the field of social economy, such as workers' co-operatives and mutual societies, not for profit organisations, or informal and non-monetised exchanges which enable most deprived communities to survive, can be conceptualised almost everywhere as efforts to oppose the extension of functional rationality, and the exercise by ordinary citizens of greater control over their living conditions, the distribution of the wealth that they produce and their consumption. In so doing, they experiment with alternative uses of time and therefore of the self and, generally, embody a concrete and yet tentative search for a model of society for which there is no pre-existing blueprint (Archambault and Archambault, 1998:87).

In contrast, the only option offered to developing countries at present is to loosen the bonds of the local, only to enslave entire populations to the whims of extra-territorial private corporations and organisations. I therefore favour a reversal of current trends, towards an economic re-localisation. This will require a radical shift in direction, and will need grassroots action to strengthen local economies combined with policy changes at national and international levels. (Depending on the type of production concerned, the local may be defined as a region, a nation state or a regional grouping of countries.) Re-localisation means shifting increasingly privatised and commoditised functions back to these economies to recover local control, as well as encouraging individual and collective self-reliance.

It is, however, important to stress that a commitment to the local community, as a frame of reference, should not preclude an openness towards the rest of the world. My vision is not one of organic societies chiefly defined by their relationship to the land, or of constitutive communities in which people's sense of belonging is rooted in identity, but of co-operative, diverse communities whose identity is in the making rather than the result of clinging to past forms. A living post-capitalist culture will

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64. Gorz, André, *Reclaiming Work*, p. 78-79.

necessarily encompass what Alain Caillé terms primary and secondary sociality.<sup>65</sup> There is a need for large territorial entities and bodies, currencies, cities and states, as well as for mediations between the local sphere and macro-society. As we have seen in the section 'In defence of socialist politics' in Chapter 3, it is the function of the political to manage the constantly evolving relationship between the universal aims (the common good) and local needs and priorities.

I am neither advocating the removal of large-scale exchange networks and a return to pre-market economies nor complete self-sufficiency. Instead I seek *relative* self-sufficiency, implying a localist emphasis, to ensure that a reduced international sector would follow the rules of fair trade. In many areas, production could be brought closer to consumption and appropriate-scale technology and local resources be used. As we will now see, these radical socio-economic changes can only occur if embedded in a shift of our definition of culture.

### Living cultures, lived world

In agricultural societies based on production for use, people were neither producers nor consumers but, to use Alvin Toffler's useful word, 'prosumers' (Toffler, 1980). With the industrial revolution having separated the two functions, people increasingly obtained their goods and services from the market – although some production for self-use continued – and the perception of the diversity of human ties as contracts came to dominate. Over the last three centuries, 'this progressive substitution of industrial goods and services for useful but non-marketable values has been the shared goal of political factions and regimes otherwise violently opposed to one another. In this way, ever larger pieces of our lives are so transformed that life itself comes to depend almost exclusively on the consumption of commodities sold on the world market' (Illich, 1996:25). Collective action must therefore seek to create and preserve spaces of exchange and co-operation not directly linked to the production of value; in other words, much more varied and fulfilling lifestyles based on a better balance between production for exchange and production for use, as was common in the earlier days of the industrial revolution.

Although a subject of much controversy in the fields of development and labour studies, we do not need to choose between labour-intensive development and the use of high technology. There is no blueprint approach given the huge diversity of situations across the planet and the need for participatory methods of democracy. In

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65. Family or friendly relationships where the person belongs to the sphere of primary sociality, whereas market or state relationships belong to secondary sociality because they are based on purely functional roles. See in particular Godbout and Caillé (1992).



order to benefit from the world's accumulated and common knowledge, we must make the most of advanced technologies through international technology transfer and Gandhian principles. Examples might include the production of decentralised, clean energy to meet local needs, improving traditional agricultural practices in a sustainable fashion, and sharing information and other advanced technologies to facilitate self-provisioning for need while economising labour and therefore relieving workers. Most importantly, in any case, a meaningful and liberating scenario will require an examination of the proportion of individuals' time to be devoted to production and to prosumption respectively, in order to achieve a high standard of living without focusing on production for the market.

I agree with André Gorz; we must rescue collective intelligence from its appropriation by global capitalism; only 'intelligence' can be at the foundation of culture because it grows from our relationship to the world as an embodied, sentient being, and encompasses the whole range of human abilities and sensibilities. Ultimately, 'the quality of a culture depends upon the dynamic balance between our intuitive knowledge of the world and the development of knowledge that it achieves. It depends upon the synergy, the positive feedback (*rétroaction*) which takes place between the development of knowledge and life experience (*savoirs vécus*). It depends upon the capacity of the development of knowledge to increase the quality of the life-world (*monde vécu*), the "quality of life"' (Gorz, 2003:108–9). In other words, choices in science and technology should always be informed by the need and aspirations of the lived world.

The only sustainable way to meet these needs and aspirations and foster individuals' autonomy is through a diversification of the modes of production and, in particular, a synergy between the autonomous and heteronomous modes of production. Illich laid down *broad* principles according to which different societies and communities might want to reach a delicate balance between affluence and creativity, external and local control: 'the criteria of conviviality are to be considered as guidelines to the continuous process by which a society's members defend their liberty, and not as a set of prescriptions which can be mechanically applied' (Illich, 2001:24). 'What is fundamental to a convivial society is not the total absence of manipulative institutions and addictive goods and services, but the balance between those tools that create those specific demands they are specialised to satisfy and those complementary enabling tools which foster self-realization. The first set of tools produces according to abstract plans for men in general; the other set enhances the ability of people to pursue their own goals in their unique way' (ibid).

In this respect, it is essential to recognise that limits to the export of the Western style of consumption are on the one hand ecological, and on the other hand of an existential nature (colonisation of the life-world). Currently, the strategies of transnational companies exercise a dictatorship over workers' needs through manufactured insecurity, and restriction of access to the resources of time and non-consumerist alternatives. At present, 'the autonomy of individuals cannot be given free rein to decide the meaningful for themselves. Instead the meaning is converted into one form only, that of consumption' (Lodziak, 2002:158). Undermining the oppressive centrality of wage labour and putting greater emphasis on non-commodity production, non-market relationships and self-providing for needs would help create a democratic debate over alternative models of consumption relevant to an eco-socialist society and culture. In the North, a viable alternative in any case demands a scaling down of commodity consumption. As Illich said: 'the generation of non-marketable use-values must inevitably occupy the centre of any culture that provides a programme for satisfactory life to a majority of its members. Cultures are programmes for activities, not for firms' (Illich, 1996:28). In such a culture, 'active people would use modern convivial tools to create an abundance of use-values that liberated them from consumption' (ibid:27).

An essential condition of this culture of autonomy is the guarantee to all inhabitants of the planet of material security through different mechanisms, including a guarantee of income. We now need to return to some practical considerations around the provision of forms of guaranteed income for which we had only laid out the principles earlier (see 'Arguments for a guaranteed income', Chapter 7).

### Routes to material security

If guaranteed income is to allow every individual to re-appropriate their own existence, the forms that it takes must reflect the diversity of socio-economic and cultural environments so that it represents a truly universal guarantee of material security. Unfortunately, the many rich debates around the practicalities of such a guarantee have so far almost exclusively centred on European contexts. While 'universality' (understood as the types of individuals it would be open to) continues to be the subject of a lively controversy, universality in its geographic sense has sadly received much less attention.

Obviously, one step will be to challenge the inequitable sharing of wealth across the planet under globalised capitalism. This will need to be done through either existing (but improved) or new regulatory mechanisms at every level (local, regional, national, European, global) to promote a truly sustainable development. It requires a cancelling

of Third World debt and could be partly financed through new taxation mechanisms such as the Tobin tax.<sup>66</sup> Mechanisms for the provision of a guaranteed income in forms appropriate for different contexts remain largely to be explored. As a modest contribution, I highlight the most interesting characteristics drawn from a number of progressive proposals that have been put forward in France.<sup>67</sup>

Such an income would be:

- unconditional (no work required in exchange);
- sufficient (therefore no pressure to accept poor employment or unwanted dependency);
- universal (not income related) but taxable as part of redesigned welfare and tax systems. A guaranteed income would be related to and part of a strong social security system. Contrary to current trends, taxation would be truly progressive (taxation rate increasing with the level of income) and would reduce the range of income levels; and
- linked to the distribution of local currencies with a social and ecological purpose and aimed at serving local exchange networks, as opposed to currency produced through the stock exchange. LETS (Local Exchange and Trading Systems) schemes are the most well-known example in Britain and France, but different models exist, including the possibility of using electronic systems.

I am aware that each of the above raises many complex issues whose resolution will vary between societies and world regions. And the degree of relevance and the importance of the above characteristics will vary considerably across the globe:

1. As suggested by André Castel, the forms of income adopted should be based on a realistic assessment of the place of the net economy within the global division of labour. Although immaterial activities act at present as the driving force behind economic growth, they are unlikely to become numerically dominant in the short term. Consequently, the coexistence of a great diversity of labour relationships calls for a range of social security systems.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in the short term and in order to manage the transitional period, a clearly unconditional income would be

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66. A suggestion made by American economist James Tobin, and taken up by the French anti-globalisation movement ATTAC, to impose a very small tax on all international monetary transactions. It is meant to dissuade speculators and, most importantly, represents a clear political signal.

67. These features do not appear all together in one single author's proposal but have been selected from a variety of sources. We are particularly in debt to Alain Caillé, André Gorz and Yann Moulier-Boutang.

68. Castel (2002:126–7), to which I would add various degrees of solidarity between relatives, friends and neighbours.

needed for immaterial forms of labour in which the socialised share of production does not lend itself to a traditional wage relation (arts professions for instance).

2. Payment in cash seems to be preferable to payment in kind because it leaves individuals free to decide how they wish to meet their needs. This will be most relevant in those regions of the world where need satisfaction is highly commoditised. Particular care should be exercised for other regions: by forcing exchange to be expressed and actualised in a monetary form, trade destroys the untapped potential of non-market human exchanges.<sup>69</sup>
3. The level and significance of an actual 'income' – although an important point of controversy – would decline where prosuming becomes more significant. Equally, and most importantly, both level and significance are intrinsically related to access to other public resources. In this respect, it is unfortunate that the debate, concerned with individual or household income, has not always integrated radical claims for universal, free provision in a number of key areas as a form of *collective guaranteed income*.<sup>70</sup> It must be remembered that the questions of access to public goods and the re-appropriation of public spaces are *intrinsically linked* to the question of a guaranteed income. In this perspective, two of the objectives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for example, a global social security system and universal access to clean water, can be seen as complementary.
4. The implementation of a form of guaranteed income must go hand in hand with a range of radical and mutually reinforcing reforms, without which, in the current context, the poor and jobless will remain socially excluded and all of us will continue to be seduced by the trappings of consumer society. In every case, it will be particularly essential to reflect upon the *interconnectedness* of the measures needed to further a move beyond a work-centred existence. We shall return to this important issue for the case of France in our conclusion. To move towards a post-capitalist world, we need a range of alternatives, 'from a mobilisatory Utopianism to medium and short term reforms. These alternatives exist and include land reform favouring peasants, mechanisms to ensure democratic control over finance capital, the redistribution of wealth through social security, and the public re-appropriation of our public inheritance, such as water, knowledge, seeds and

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69. As Anne-Marie Chartier appropriately reminds us in *Essai critique sur le concept de développement* (1996:114).

70. As suggested by the various '*Collectif sans ticket (CST)*' in Belgium and France which are arguing for free public transport in urban areas as every citizen's right. On similar lines, the organisation 'Droit à l'énergie – SOS Futur', born in October 2000, wants to see energy accepted as 'a fundamental right, recognised by all during the course of her or his existence, everywhere in the world', (Clerc, 2002:139). These proposals must of course be added to more traditional claims in the areas of food, water, health and education.

generic medicines. Public participation at every level is the key to each of these' (Houtart and Polet, 2001:vii). Guaranteeing material security is about providing the right 'tools', such as capital, teachers of all kinds for new forms of education (through community workshops for instance), institutions, and relaxed laws and regulations. Most importantly, education and learning need to be fundamentally rethought: education for autonomy and democracy is the opposite of a system producing workers and consumers of commodities, commercial services and packaged culture. In order to achieve technically advanced, self-providing communities, in order to meet needs that can be covered by one's own activities or local production, towns and localities should also provide facilities for skills exchange and self-directed learning to take place, including tool-lending libraries. More generally, essential to resisting both the centrality of wage labour as well as the hegemony of the market, cities should offer a range of incentives to engage people in an equally wide range of 'not for profit activities', carried out both individually and in groups: sports, arts and crafts, politics, culture, etc. Depending on the context, these activities can either complement or replace waged work or market activities, making part-time employment more attractive and more meaningful, and even prevent people being forced into waged work on unfavourable terms (forced proletarianisation). As Gorz puts it, alternative urban policies would help 'reconstitute a liveable life-world' by fostering both self-activity and co-operation, and exchange on the basis of free association. 'Changing the city' would make it possible for changes to be 'embodied in the material world', in times and spaces like theatres and other places of culture and entertainment, health centres, restaurants and canteens, schools, libraries, and other educational facilities, parks and streets. Cities would foster what philosopher Felix Guattari termed 'molecular revolutions', because people living differently would think differently.<sup>71</sup>

5. Finally, as control over subsistence has always been an essential ingredient of the dominance of the wage labour regime, the question of food security deserves a particular mention.<sup>72</sup> While this will be most obvious for countries in the South, in the North grassroots initiatives such as allotments, community-supported agriculture and farmers' markets should be encouraged. Generally, the multifaceted issue of the relationship between city and country needs tackling.

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71. The last three quotes and the reference to Guattari are taken from the beginning of the section called 'Changing the city' in Gorz (1999:100-2).

72. The strong case made by Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies in *The Subsistence Perspective* (1999) has largely inspired this final comment.

The development of cities is indeed part and parcel of the civilising process. It is therefore not an issue of going back to the land for the population of highly urbanised countries, but of preventing an unsustainable and unmanageable urbanisation process on a mass scale, which turns people into 'off-soil' urban workers–consumers. There is therefore a need for a comprehensive framework to influence the migration process in socially acceptable ways. In both North and South, this includes policies such as income and land-tenure arrangement, distribution of social services, transport and orientation of the educational system. In both, this would imply altering the parasitic relationship between the city and country or, as Bennholdt-Thompson and Mies suggest (1999) making cities arable and at the same time making the countryside attractive to live and work in.

## Conclusion

Looking back over the debates which have taken place since the original edition of this piece of research, it is apparent that a significant shift has taken place. Until the end of the 1990s, all those who contributed radical proposals towards a new politics of time focused mainly on reducing working hours. More recently, however, discussions have been increasingly centred on the provision of some form of guaranteed income.<sup>73</sup> My third and final section is no exception to this.

Does this mean that the historic struggle started by the labour movement for a reduction in working time is no longer relevant? Not in the slightest. In France, the achievements of the 35-hour week are on the agenda at a time when it has become an easy target for the current government and its advisors from the employers' trade-union, the MEDEF.<sup>74</sup> Clearly, in view of the employment, social and fiscal policies being implemented, the so-called 'rehabilitation of work', displayed as a worthwhile objective by those in power, transpires to be nothing other than an orchestrated ploy to make employees work more for less.

In general, in countries like France where wage labour is well established and still represents an essential means of acquiring resources and status, a guaranteed income must be linked to an equitable and ongoing sharing of working hours as much as it must be complemented by the allocation of resources designed to support people's ability to act, produce, co-operate and find a purpose outside a work-centred and consumerist culture.

Thus a reduction of working hours remains one essential ingredient of a three-pronged strategy to move beyond a work-based society. But only *complementary*

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73. A notion which seemed anathema to many not so long ago, in particular to trade unionists whose outlook has been shaped by a strong workist culture. The idea of some degree of uncoupling of work and income is making slow but steady progress in their circles too.

74. This is the meaning of small phrases dropped by members of the current cabinet: for Jean-Pierre Raffarin himself, the Aubry Laws are the symptom of a society that has worryingly 'gone off' work, whereas 'the future of France is not to be a huge leisure/entertainment park', quoted by Denis Clerc in '35 heures, pourquoi tant de haine?' (2003:7). In this article, Clerc provides a welcome correction to some of the worse allegations against the impact of this reform.

reforms implemented *together* in the three areas of working time, income/material security and use of liberated time will take French society, and others like it, one step towards a society which has shaken off its obsession with work, efficiency, and consumption. We have much to learn from the serious shortcomings and failures of the Aubry law, such as the way it was implemented and the lack of accompanying reforms.

Since this law was implemented, the situation for the unemployed and underemployed has undoubtedly worsened: they face cuts in benefits, vexing administrative checks and starker pressures to re-enter the labour market at all costs; the working poor and mass insecurity (*précarité*) are becoming features of French society, as elsewhere in Europe. These factors are indisputably putting pressure on employees to accept increasingly poor employment standards. This is why the theme of an unconditional income has moved to the foreground: a sufficient continuous income for a discontinuous activity would represent a way for workers to regain some negotiating power over pay, working conditions and working hours, understood as the share of their life devoted to earning a living.

Ultimately what is at stake is the distribution of the wealth produced both within nations or groups of nations and between poorer and richer regions of the globe. In this context, the proposal (put forward by a number of organisations of the unemployed and insecure) for a European social wage equivalent to 50 per cent of each nation's GDP per inhabitant is interesting.<sup>75</sup> Beyond the European Union, as I argue above, a sufficient income would lessen the pressure to enter the wage relationship and would be a step towards global solidarity, by reversing the tendency to make individuals bear risks themselves.

The financing of such a measure, through a redirection of fiscal and aid policies for instance, however complex, is merely of a technical nature. The decision to implement it is, however, a political decision. It will only occur through relentless ideological struggle, with the support of a broad coalition and by a change in mentalities.

We need to provide a continuity of rights to all citizens of the planet, including employees in non-standard contracts and non-waged workers. In particular, it demands that priority be given to *distribution* in the form of an unconditional social wage over *redistribution* of income thought of as welfare; in other words, to a fairer allocation of a share of the collective wealth produced on an increasingly wide basis.

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75. See in particular [www.euromarches.org](http://www.euromarches.org). The Euromarches have been organising marches since 1996 to coordinate the struggles of the unemployed, insecure workers, and other victims of social exclusion.



With the globalisation of economic exchange, the new modes of capitalist production now affect all aspects of life: environmental degradation and social dislocation; new enclosures in the form of the extension of intellectual property rights, including patenting of seeds; loss of autonomy and self-sufficiency, therefore undermining any resistance to a generalisation of the wage labour regime and the economisation of existence.

This is why the social wage that I, along with others, am arguing for, rests on the widest possible convergence between overworked professionals, the insecure, homeless, migrants, landless peasants and indigenous people. It should become an axis of the anti-globalisation struggle. It is a major component of a truly sustainable development and a tool in the furthering of autonomy that must be the goal of a political ecology worthy of its name.



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