

Student Workers Inquiry

Part I:

SOIL

Matriculation no. r0370126

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May, 2011

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Introduction

This diploma work is part of a broader (anti-)project¹ aimed at investigating forms of power and agency connected to the figure of the student-worker within the edu-factory, as well as more broadly, the extent to which that figure is already a worker within a broader social-factory, or the socialized relations of production. The anti-project didn't necessarily *begin* as such, but could be described as an extension of a period of protest that the Temporary Institute (in a former incarnation) once described as having “blossomed from the bullshit of everyday oppression and exploitation”. [AG Hexenkraft, 2009] One of the major expressions of this protest occurred in October 2009 with the occupation of the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, (later also referred to as the Academy of Refusal) and the ‘uni-brennt’ (university burns) occupation movement that successfully connected with a large number of other protests in educational institutions throughout central and eastern Europe, but, ultimately failed to move beyond a limited view of the university. The processes that produced this protest movement, had been going on already for some time, and had already elicited many years of various and less mediated forms of protest. The specific educational reform process - the Bologna Process - cannot be separated from the ongoing processes / crises of capitalist development, as well as from the various transformations of the conditions of work. The anti-project then is an attempt to question these changed conditions of work, with a view towards organizing against them.

The main focus of the diploma study will be the exploration of a key text in the elaboration of the social-factory concept, from the 1960s Operaismo movement in Italy. The purpose of this study is firstly, to see to what extent the social-factory hypothesis is valid today, and secondly, to provide a theoretical basis for better comprehending the issues and conflicts surrounding the Feminist-Marxist, Lotta Femminista (Feminist Struggle) & Wages For Housework movements that emerged during the 1970s (mostly) in Italy, the UK, and the US. The more detailed study of the latter will form part II of the current paper.

¹ This project is not sure if it is in fact a project, or if it should actually position itself against the ‘project’ inasmuch as it has become a dominant form of work in many parts of the world. “Project” increasingly conjures up the image of a hamster’s treadmill, or as the Carrot Workers Collective strive to point out; a carrot, being dangled in front of our noses, but which one never gets to eat. The anti-project can be understood then in terms of the struggle against labour, and so as the struggle against the general precarity and powerlessness found in ‘project’ work.

What directly follows here is an introduction to the basic idea and theory behind the Student Workers Union proposal and the related task of beginning inquiries into the contemporary conditions of work. The following notes are based on a number of workshops that were aimed at connecting with or starting transnational networks of (student-) labour-struggle.

Student Workers Union

At the basis of the investigation are the two following ideas, that;

- *students are already workers*
- and that *society is a factory*

On the one hand, the aim is to look at the various ways the figure of the ‘student’ is made increasingly productive, or is made to work more, i.e. by raising tuition fees, or increasing loans. On the other hand, it is to look at the university, and other educational institutions, as sites and organisers of that productivity and exploitation, so to see them as Edu-Factories, or as part of a broader social-factory.

One of the key questions then is; if students are workers, how might they organize as workers? And furthermore, how might they then connect with other workers in the social-factory, and within global & local chains of production.

One of the key motivations for the Student Workers Union proposal was a feeling that street demonstrations and occupations alone are too easily ignored by those in power, so there was a desire to investigate students’ role as workers, both inside and outside the educational institution, to get a clearer understanding of labour-power, and how that could be used, i.e. what would a ‘student’ strike mean, what would happen if ‘students’ went on strike as students, but from their places of wage labour? What would happen to the profits of the retail industry if students collectively didn’t show up for work, or organised ‘slow-downs’? What would happen if those student-workers connected and created solidarity with all the other precarious workers on the social factory-floor?

Students who Work & Workers who Study

In the current work and education landscape, it becomes increasingly difficult to see where work starts and study begins. In the US, the National Center for Educational Statistics uses the categories ‘Students who Work’ and ‘Workers who Study’, and Mark Bousquet notes:

A huge fraction of persons describing themselves as “students who work” work full-time or more, and likewise a large proportion of those self-reporting as “workers who study” work part-time and go to school on a full-time basis. [Bousquet, 2008]

In the UK in 2007, two thirds of full-time students had a job [NUS/TUC, 2007]. In Austria 80% of students in higher education work between 22 and 38 hours per week [Generation Praktikum, 2010], and this tendency persists in many other places. This is one aspect of the way students have become an underpaid/unpaid, and easily exploitable form of labour, both inside and outside the institution. To be clear, the aim isn't to file a complaint concerning loss of privilege, but an attempt to find points of connection, common struggle and solidarity with other workers facing similar problems. Furthermore, it helps to counter the idea that students are simply customers in some kind of education supermarket. Students definitely work, so there are relations of exploitation both inside and outside of the educational institution, and the aim is to find out how this concretely works, and to figure out the power of this workforce called ‘student’.

A Feminist Union

It's important to begin with the idea of the student as worker, however the idea is not necessarily to create a union, but to engage in a discussion on **work** and **organization**. To do this, this text would like to return to the definition of work that grew out of the groups Lotta Femminista in Italy as well as the more widespread Wages For Housework. In their analysis of capitalism they recognised that women “produce the most precious product to appear on the capitalist market: labour-power itself [...] This means that behind every factory, behind every school, behind every office or mine is the hidden work of millions of women who have consumed their life, their labour-power, in producing the labour power that works in that factory, school, office or mine.” [Dalla Costa in Cox, Federici, 1972: pp.4-5]²

For these reasons they demanded a wage, in order that labour in the home be recognised as work and not as a service or a ‘labour of love’. In demanding a wage, they were not merely

² “The community is essentially the woman's place in the sense that women appear and directly expend their labour there. But the factory is just as much the place where is embodied the labour of women who do not appear there and who have transferred their labour to the men who are the only ones to appear there. In the same way, the school embodies the labour of women who do not appear there but who have transferred their labour to the students who return every morning fed, cared for, and ironed by their mothers.” Mariarosa Dalla Costa, ‘Community, Factory and School from the Woman's Viewpoint’, L'Offensiva, Musolini, Turin, 1972

trying to unwittingly enter into a system of exploitation, but to firstly point out that a vast amount of labour went unnoticed and unpaid. Another group that emerged from these analyses was Wages for Schoolwork who drew a parallel, in which the figure of the student within the education system played a similar productive role,

... What makes it easy for capital to impose and, if stopped, re-impose schoolwork is that it is unwaged work. Its unwaged character gives it an appearance of personal choice and its refusal an equally personal even "psychological" symptom. So, ironically, though students consider themselves, at times, the most advanced part of the working class they still belong to the ranks of unwaged workers. This unwaged status has profound consequences for the student movement and the class struggle at this moment. First, **because they are unwaged workers students can be cheaply used as workers outside schools and universities to reduce wage levels.** Second, by being unwaged, Capital can restructure the schools and increase intensity and productivity requirements at little cost. [Caffentzis, 1975]

So within this analysis it becomes apparent that any fights against ‘austerity’ or cuts to university funding, need to begin with an understanding of one’s place, and of one’s role as a worker;

The starting point is not how to do housework [or schoolwork] more efficiently, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle, that is, not a higher productivity of domestic [or educational] labour but a higher subversiveness in the struggle. [Dalla Costa, James; 1971]

Beginning with this feminist perspective of work, and the student as worker, one key task is to look at these theories more closely and connect them with the other ways that the figures of the student and the worker (in the broadest sense) have been made increasingly productive. So to look at student debt, especially as a claim on future productivity, and to talk about the Edu-Factory collective’s call for the abolition of the Student Debt,³ as well as looking at other aspects connected to student labour such as the structure of pedagogy and the way it replicates a capital-labour relation, or a class structure in the classroom; things like Life Long learning and its hidden demand to forever be capable of paying for new skills; and the ever-growing, and increasingly likely prospect of unemployment, and its ‘educational’ role.

³ Edu-Factory Collective’s *Campaign Against Debt*; http://www.edu-factory.org/edu15/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=356:campaign-against-debt&catid=38:documentation&Itemid=56

The Social Factory

One question and key idea of the proposal for a Student Workers Union is the concept of the social-factory, defined by Tiziana Terranova as “the shift from a society where production takes place predominantly in the closed site of the factory to one where it is the whole of society that is turned into a factory – a productive site.” [Bousquet, Terranova, 2004]

This concept is heavily elaborated (perhaps overly complexified) in the next section, and is anything but simple, but it has been a very interesting filter with which to dwell in this posited factory space that is potentially where one exists 24/7:

On Saturday I was on the tube at Bank [London], it was packed on the way to the platform, and really hot. A woman a little bit in front of me suddenly dropped her shopping and some people bumped into her, then went around, me too (plus habitual negative feeling against people getting in my way) but as I glanced back I saw that her hand was shaking uncontrollably, and that she was in a bit of state. I went and offered to help her carry the bags, she gave me one of four huge bags filled with what looked like takeaway, maybe 20 or thirty small boxes in each bag, she smiled and said ‘very heavy’. I was later wondering if she was in fact delivering the food, and couldn’t help seeing the tunnels of the underground as part of the factory floor, the lady someone who has received an injury at work, potentially long-term. But she can go to no union, or even count on solidarity from the other workers all around.

If the entire city, or environment is understood as being inherently productive, as continually being the place of work - on the one hand it’s simply depressing - but it also helps to imagine a broader category of ‘worker’ with an expanded potential for solidarity. So the question then is what form would a union or labour organisation take that could operate on this level of the social-factory? Another text that shows the extent of this idea of the social-factory is the *Communiqué from an Absent Future* by Research and Destroy, who were involved in the university occupations in California in 2009:

University life finally appears as just what it has always been: a machine for producing compliant producers and consumers. Even leisure is a form of job training. The idiot crew of the frat houses drink themselves into a stupor with all the dedication of lawyers working late at the office. Kids who smoked weed and cut class in high-school now pop Adderall and get to work. We power the diploma factory on the treadmills in the gym. We run tirelessly in elliptical circles. [Research and Destroy, 2009]

Another place that demonstrates this, also in terms of how sites of education and of work become increasingly entangled, is the unemployment office. On the one hand education is geared more and more to producing people for the ‘job market’, on the other hand unemployment offices increasingly send people ‘back to school’ so that they are temporarily taken off the unemployment statistics. Students in education, study for the precarious workplace and the unemployed, in perhaps slightly different circumstances, do the same. Suddenly the problems facing ‘students’ and the ‘unemployed’ become very similar, they are both having to study/work for free in order to get a job in the future, a scenario that many other people face. This is not to say that these groups are exactly the same, but to show parallels and potential solidarities, under what are similar pressures. Also, taking into consideration current levels of youth unemployment, the nasty side of ideas such as ‘Life Long Learning’ become apparent; in order to maintain access to the wage, one must be able to put in a lot of study time, for which one is either unpaid, or has to pay (ever increasing) tuition fees.

These are then some examples among many where the ‘student-worker’ or ‘worker-student’ in the widest sense, starts to become a very broad and potentially powerful social figure – a site, or subjectivity maybe, for an alliance of the unemployed, migrantworkers, houseworkers, school kids, parents, university students, sexworkers, workers in offices and factories, people trying to pay off their student debts among the credit cards and mortgages. We are a long way from this perspective, but the recognition of ones place as a worker in the expanded global factory seems to be a way to make this possible, and a revolutionary process that takes up this challenge and bases itself on this broader notion of the worker is going to be very interesting.

Student Debt & Labour

If students (as well as many others) are workers in this social-factory, the task then is to identify exactly what those forms of work are, how exploitation functions and where exactly to intervene and challenge it. As a start regarding student-labour, the following are three sketched out forms, or better said, perspectives, tentatively titled; Reproductive Work, McJobs™, and the Edu-Temping Agency, although they are in reality, very often much more entangled.

1. (RE-)PRODUCTIVE WORK

In the 1960s students protested their role in the reproduction of the class system, which they identified the university as a central part of. So in a sense students ‘work’ to reproduce one of the institutions that defines the division of labour.

In the 60s “economic planning stressed the idea that an educated workforce is essential to economic growth. This was the premise for state investment in mass education, leading students to see themselves as workers, leading to the idea that studying is work that is functional to the capitalist organization of work, rather than to our own self-realization, and that academic institutions are factories that are mass-producing the next generation of workers. Thus in the US, we began to develop the idea of “wages for schoolwork”, arguing that those who were to benefit from our education should pay for our schoolwork.” [Federici, Caffentzis, 2008]

Interestingly, someone involved in the 2011 London anti-cuts protests expressed a similar idea in a discussion forum:

“Get a job”, yeah good one. I don’t pretend to represent the impoverished or oppressed, but I am still not going to pay more than I feel is fair for a set of skills that will benefit my future employer as much, if not more, than they will me. Fuck that, and if I feel a bit fucked, I will fuck things up. So fuck them and fuck you too... feel a bit better now...

One note to make on this perspective of student work, put forward by George Caffentzis, is that a rise in tuition fees, apart from being a way to squeeze people directly on the labour marketplace, also effectively functions as a wage cut. He states that “with the elimination of stipends, allowances, and free tuition, the cost of ‘education’, i.e. the cost of preparing oneself for work, has been imposed squarely on the work-force, in what amounts to a massive wage-cut”. [Caffentzis, 2010] Thus what’s left is a system whereby one has to pay (and pay a lot) in order to have the chance to access waged work.

2. McJOBS™

This, mainly service sector work, is largely performed by students outside the educational institution, but increasingly inside as well.⁴ It's working bad hours for low pay with no benefits, tuition fee increases in relation are just a tool for businesses to open up and access a massive pool of super cheap labour. Marc Bousquet gets into this in 'Students are Already Workers' and points out that this field is heavily under researched, and urgently needs to be addressed. He also notes a lack of identification with one's role as worker; "I am not a package handler – I am working as a package handler for a while" (from a blog on working for UPS). So there is a kind of mis-identification, one doesn't identify with what one is doing, instead there's an identification with an image of oneself in the future; the work that is done in the present isn't seen as work, but as a means to another end. On the one hand this suits business interests very well, on the other it seems that the projected image of the future is also simply false for millions of students in higher education, who finish 'studying' only to find the queues at the unemployment office. There is an urgent need for a change of perspective; to look at "how and where I work now", not in an egocentric sense, but to look at it in terms of how that work connects with, and its place within, global and local chains of production. When this work is coupled with the idea of (re-)productive labour within the edu-factory, as well as with the fact that one is very often paying towards performing this work, the term 'hyper-exploitation' seems to make a lot of sense. No longer exploitation in the sense of not getting back all the value one produced, but now one even pays in order to produce that value, one pays to have one's labour power sucked out in the education factory. The university then "– like the factory – becomes the location of an oppositional agency. Students – in their new character as workers in the present rather than in the future – will, in my view, eventually understand themselves as the agents of their own exploitation. At that moment, we'll understand the information university to have called forth its own gravediggers." [Bousquet, Terranova, 2004]

⁴ See for instance the April 2011 protest at the Theatre, Film and Media Science Department of the University of Vienna, where students successfully organized to cancel a 'lecture' - sponsored by the tissue company 'Feh' - that had the explicit aim of using the students to trawl through hours of old films looking for scenes depicting the usage of tissues, which one assumes would then be sent on to other advertising workers to create a marketing campaign. For those students having to pay tuition fees to attend (work for) that course, it amounts to paying in order to be directly exploited. <http://derstandard.at/1302745246208/Theaterwissenschaft-Lehrveranstaltung-nach-Studierenden-Protesten-abgesagt>

3. EDU-TEMPING AGENCY

The third form is simply when the educational institution functions as an *Arbeitgeber* (lit. 'work-provider'), which is also a good indicator of how easily capital flows through the walls of the university. It includes instances when companies sponsor courses that are directly profitable to them, or when teachers are paid by private companies. It is a way of having students work to develop new products, or new ideas, for example. This is happening a lot in the sciences where companies sponsor labs and student-workers to produce for them without paying wages. Another example might be the NHS (although still not an entirely private entity) in the UK using midwifery students after one year of a three-year course, to actually deliver babies, which is sold as work-experience, but is actually already the job itself (also a clear connection here to reproductive labour).

In Vienna this could even be said to happen, when for example a professor tells the students to design layouts for an upcoming international architecture exhibition, in order to get credit for that semester. So a direct exploitation of student workers by a professor for personal financial gain, the 'payment' for the students - the ECTS credit points, and the 'cultural capital' or CV value of having worked for something 'real'.⁵ This again seems to come back to a kind of debt or investment logic, I will work for free now, pouring value into my *Lebenslauf* (curriculum vitae), into my personal 'human capital' with the hope that one day I will be able to cash in on my built up 'culture'. The same logic goes for the *Generation Praktikum* (internship generation) who must work for free until a certain unknown point in time when they will be deemed to have built up enough experience to receive a wage for their already productive labour.

Another possible form or at least discussion to start in terms of labour within education, is the pedagogical relation between teacher and student, Stewart Martin has called it 'The Pedagogy of Human capital' a sort of capitalist worker relation that is played out within the classroom, the teacher as holder of the means of knowledge production, the students as people working to receive credit points as a kind of wage, at the same time replicating the broader system of exploitation

⁵ To be specific, this story refers to the Institute for Art und Architecture, at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, which has recently been described in a Quality Assessment Peer Review, as teaching "creativity... by production." "The students therefore seem to turn rather into **an instrument of production** and not into an analytical personality." Students are described as working in "a succession of workmanlike, somewhat anonymous studios" in contrast to the space of the teaching staff, which is "well-lived and informal". It is also noted that student workloads are so great that "little time is left for the enjoyment of student-life. The following phrase gives it a most striking expression: "**staff think, students produce.**"
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/55923584>

A lot more investigation needs to be carried out, so these notes should be seen as an invitation, and perhaps the beginning of a framework within which to begin ‘student-workers’ inquiries, to look at one’s surroundings and ask what is it about this place that is productive, what is the work I perform within it? Not to improve the efficiency of that work, but to figure out it can be refused en masse. At the same time there’s a need to see how many students are ‘working’, as well as how many workers are ‘studying’ or training in different locations, to build up a form of labour organization that is transnational in its very beginnings, that dispenses with the myth of the Nation, and recognises that ‘austerity’ and cutbacks are part of a multinational political-economic system that organizes oppression and exploitation, and is now destroying everything from libraries to hospitals, axing public services, as well as selling off everything it can (that is in those countries where it hasn’t happened already). The aim is to begin doing all of this with a view towards recognising a collective power, beyond the national, and beyond the trade, located in the complexities and various zones of the social-factory.

One last note - in thinking of the medieval origins of the university as organizations of various trades or guilds, as well as an interest in creating a labour organization that is beyond the workers’ or students’ union - we would like to consider the creation, not only of the Edu-Factory Network’s proposed ‘Global Autonomous University’, but also of a Global Autonomous Union, a transforming perhaps of the edu-factories into spaces of the organization of class struggle. Not to instigate a new avant-garde, but to hijack the universities for labour and against capital, to collapse the teacher-student-worker hierarchies in a community fighting against the power of capital, to maybe in a way, *massify the academies of refusal*.

SOIL

TOIL

[]OIL

The fact is that as I was trying to find the cause of my lack of joy, I had to admit that the context within which I had struggled in the 70s, in front of the factories or in the houses - basically the coupling time-money ... constituted a ground which had failed to move my deep currents in order to produce fluxes of energy. This is the reason why I had felt no joy. [...] What I missed was something which could positively generate emotions, a strong imaginary, which could open different scenarios. I needed to encounter other questions and new subjects, who desired and were able to effectively think a different world. Therefore for part of the 80s I continued to wander around, from room to room, in the house of reproduction. Until, at a certain point, I saw the door to the garden, I saw the issue of the earth.

Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Door to the Garden – Feminism and Operaismo*, 2002

Viewed from the standpoint of the objective relations of capitalist society, the greatest work of art is equal to a certain quantity of manure. (Marx)

Ian Burn, *Pricing Works of Art*, 1975

That day I resolved, therefore, to follow God's counsel. I went and purchased an old iron mortar that I had seen for sale in the Borough, and I carried it myself with some effort. I then went to the Vauxhall Bridge in search of a load of river sand from the Thames. I gave that sand many washings, so as to ensure it was free of dirt. I pounded it into as fine a dust as I could manage.

I then took charcoal which I pounded.

I took ashes from our hearth, that is to say ashes from coal.

I took a brick and pounded it as well.

I mixed these substances to form a mineral-vegetal powder.

I mixed this powder to my urine and to my excrement and I fashioned earth.

Pierre Leroux, *Letter to the States of Jersey*, 1853

The following essay; *Society is (not) a Factory*, takes as its point of departure the political or marxist feminism of the 1960s and 70s that emerged from the Operaismo and Autonomia movements. This framework is especially of interest to the extent that it drew from, and therefore embodied, a transnational approach to class struggle;

If operaismo and autonomia developed through the specific situation in Italy, the movement drew much from abroad: from Martin Glaberman, George Rawick and C.L.R. James to Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari; from the Industrial Workers of the World to Socialisme ou Barbarie and American counterculture. Marazzi thus writes: “What can be considered as the most original theoretical contribution to Italian workerism originated abroad ... There is nothing 'Italian;' about the class warfare in Italy ... To erect a monument to Italy is to play the game of the Italian State; to misrepresent as specific ('the production of certain intellectuals') what is in fact rooted in the worker's history, rooted, above all, in its international dimension. [Marazzi in Thoburn, 2003]

The crucial and groundbreaking analysis of Feminist-Marxism, that the unpaid work of women in the home is centrally productive work, places the productive and reproductive power of women as a crucial component of any labour struggle. The task faced then by groups such as *Wages for Housework*, *Lotta Femminista*, and others who took on the challenge of trying to organise forms of unpaid labour, or specifically ‘housewives’, was to challenge widely held assumptions about ‘productive’ work, and fundamentally to state that housework, as well as other forms of unpaid, hidden or reproductive labour “*is work – the work of producing and reproducing the work force.*” [Federici, 1984]

The current inquiry (especially in its manifestations outside of this paper), in terms of investigating forms of organised ‘student’ labour, faces many of the same complexities and ambiguities. How can one demand to be paid a wage – and therefore institutionalize – the work done, for example, in the home? Why would students demand wages, the mediator/measure of exploitation, instead of refusing the wage? At a fundamental level - and this needs to be looked at, considered in depth, but above all repeated (at least as the basis for investigation) – ‘students’ and ‘housewives’ *are workers* already. Part of a broader system of exploitation and precarity, with the difference that the lack of a wage serves to keep the productive elements of various forms of work, such as studentwork, housework or migrantwork hidden. This paper will therefore begin with an investigation of this notion of work, to see from where it emerged, and to explore it to see what it turns up in terms of the current (and seemingly perpetual) crisis/crises of the university and education – this is done with a view towards testing it’s validity in practice and organisation. One, perhaps important

note to add here; it is the opinion of this author that hypotheses pertaining to social struggle, or class conflict, can only be verified in practice, in the struggle itself – so the following is a hypothesis concerning the changed/changing nature of work, knowledge, education as well as capital and its current phase of ‘crisis’. It is also intended as a basis for understanding the role of an organized student/knowledge/edu- labour movement or organization.

The first question then is, what is the connection between the specific role of the houseworker as (re)productive worker and a more generally expanded or diffuse notion of work? Or, how exactly does this analysis help to understand the interconnections between various other forms of hidden and unpaid work? As previously mentioned, one of the working assumptions of this paper is that the whole of society is a factory, but it strikes one as a somewhat ambiguous statement, and the category of the social-factory needs to be more thoroughly addressed. In order to get a better understanding of this term I’d like to follow a path from some of the early thoughts of the Operaismo movement, specifically focussing on the writings of Mario Tronti, to the statements and analyses of the Wages for Housework movement, especially the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici (the latter however will form the sequel to the current diploma paper). For now this will focus on Tronti’s essays that engaged with re-defining labour-power and class - work he described as a “Marxian purge of Marxism” – as well as connections, developments and ambiguities with the ideas of the Wages for Housework movement; and the importance of re-visiting these ideas and perspectives as tools for looking at potential forms of organized labour, in the current and forthcoming crisis episode.

The purpose of drawing this specific line is to, on the one hand, delve into ideas that seem pertinent to the current ‘crisis’, or the latest current of a crisis that has been an ongoing element of capitalism since its inception, as well as to distance the current investigation from what’s generally understood as an ‘autonomist’, or ‘post-operaist’ position. The creation of this distance is important because within the development of post-operaism, specifically in the work of certain key post-operaist thinkers (notably Negri, Lazzarato) there are crucial problematics that need to be addressed, and a sense that certain widely-disseminated concepts such as ‘immaterial labour’, the ‘multitude’ or even ‘post-fordism’ are in fact detrimental to an effective understanding of the contemporary composition of labour, as well as to forming a wide-ranging transnational workers’ movement.

To leave this aside for the moment, one important reference in terms of developing student-worker inquiries, is the fact that the whole intellectual edifice of post-autonomia/operaismo is based on a series of workers' inquiries into the conditions of factory-work that took place in 1950/60s Italy. It was these acts of *conricerca* (co-research) between factory-workers and academics (including the rarely translated work of Romano Alquati) that initiated what is referred to as the autonomist inversion, a depiction of class struggle that avoided (and still seems to avoid) the pitfalls of the traditional left. It is then for this reason that this study returns to the early work of Mario Tronti, firstly inasmuch as it was a direct outcome of this period of *conricerca*, and secondly, because in its explication of certain capitalist developments it depicts capitalism in a way that still seems very prescient. So in the midst of a theoretical climate that seems immersed in the 'end', the 'post-', or the 'new', it is possible to reconnect with a simple continuity, that is the continuing reality of capitalist domination and crisis, but also inherently the continuities of working-class history and struggle. It is by re-connecting with these continuities that the excessive power of capital can potentially be countered. It is this *conricerca* approach to theory that is aimed for, not necessarily within this paper (which remains wholly within the limits of the theoretical) but in the broader development of inquiries into the nature of the social-factory.

One additional note, if it's possible to accept that today one lives in something like a social-factory, then the method for investigating this environment also needs to take this perspective into consideration. How does one analyze that which structures ones surroundings? It seems here that a methodology perhaps found within concepts such as artistic research could be useful, (although not sense in which it is presented as enabling previously manual artists to now also intellectualize⁶) an approach that is at once theoretical, schizophrenic, practical, literary, artistic etc., a study of socialized production from a multi-/non-disciplinary approach. Additionally a phenomenological approach that dives into what Husserl might call 'the constantly flowing consciousness' of worklife, could be interesting, especially to the extent that phenomenology is perhaps the closest philosophy gets to being a lived, as opposed to a formulated, process.⁷ In that sense it becomes an effective investigative tool in terms of class

⁶ As an upcoming symposium organized by the European Artistic Research Network (EARN) seems to suggest; 'ART AS A THINKING PROCESS, Visual Forms of Knowledge Production'. "The goal of the symposium is to discuss ... **the idea that art is to be conceived as lying within the thinking process itself.**" Truly groundbreaking stuff.

⁷ "There results a fatal contradiction, which you indicate under the name of the contradiction of immanence and transcendence. But this contradiction comes from the fact that, once you formulate your doctrine, you necessarily posit an object exterior to man. Thus your doctrine, in order not to be contradictory, must remain

struggle, a method of philosophical enquiry that can play out in the living labour process itself, a necessity if one accepts the premise of constant factory existence.

unformulated, only lived. But is a doctrine which is only lived still a philosophical doctrine?" [Bréhier in Merleau-Ponty, 1964: pp.29-30]

SOCIETY IS [NOT] A FACTORY

You have meddled with the primal forces of nature Mr. Beale, and I won't have it. Is that clear? ... It is ebb and flow, tidal gravity. It is ecological balance. You are an old man who thinks in terms of nations and peoples. There are no nations, there are no peoples... there are no third-worlds, there is no West. There is only one holistic system of systems, one vast and immane, interwoven, interactive, multi-varied, multi-national dominion of dollars, petro-dollars, electro-dollars, multi-dollars, reichmarks, rins, rubles, pounds and shekels. It is the international system of currency which determines the totality of life on this planet, that is the natural order of things today. [...] We no longer live in a world of nations and ideologies Mr Beale. [...] There is only IBM and ITT, and AT&T, and Dupont, Dow, Union Carbide and Exxon. Those are the nations of the world today. [...] The world is a college of corporations, inexorably determined by the immutable by-laws of business.

The world... is a business, Mr. Beale. [The Network, 1976]

In order to understand how the concept of the 'social-factory' has developed, and what it might mean today, the following is a close-reading of Mario Tronti's text *La fabbrica e la società*⁸ [*Factory & Society*], with a few detours through related phenomena and theories. This particular text is still to be translated into english so all translations of it here, and mistakes (as well as **emphases**) are my own.⁹ The reason for looking at this particular text is that it is often cited as the originator of the social-factory concept (Cleaver, Wright, Thoburn, Vittorio Aureli) although interestingly Tronti himself doesn't use the term. The engagement with Tronti's writing is not intended as an endorsement of the ideas present in his work; the open admiration for the Leninist takeover of the state apparatus, as well as for the 'revolutionary party' as the "highest form of the class struggle" sound fairly redundant today. Tronti also seems to have been largely sidelined by post-operaist thought, and he was already

⁸ Originally published in the magazine *Quaderni Rossi*, no. 2 in 1962, the essay was later republished in; *Operai e capitale* (Deriveapprodi, 2006) – this book (*Workers and Capital*) was originally published in italian in 1966 (Turin: Einaudi) and although it is commonly cited as a seminal work remains to be fully translated into english.

⁹ Translations and citations here are from the german version of the chapter 'Fabrik und Gesellschaft' itself translated from the italian by Wildcat Germany – book: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/28696770/Mario-Tronti-Arbeiter-und-Kapital>, chapter: http://www.wildcat-www.de/dossiers/operaismus/Fabrik_und_Gesellschaft_QR_2.pdf

back within the relative safety of the Italian Communist Party (PCI; where he remains as a senator) by the time of the Red Brigades and the subsequent political violence and repression at the end of the 1970s. His work does however offer some very interesting perspectives, analyses and important reversals that have permeated Autonomia and Operaismo, as well as many other approaches to capitalism, and workers' struggles.

Apparitions

The portrayal of capitalism within *Factory and Society* often has an illusory character, everything 'appears' in a certain way, things often 'seem' other than they actually are and Tronti often acts as de-mystifier, the one who reveals the inner mysteries and delusions that function within a capitalist system. Whilst holding a certain scepticism towards this role of 'truth-revealer' certain ideas presented in the work *seem* to carry a certain accuracy when held up against the backdrop of the current and enduring capitalist crash (or coup). The text seems haunted then to a certain extent what by that which, after Derrida, we might call Marx's spectrology – the science of studying apparitions. The notes presented here are an attempt to sketch out a 'class-perspective' for the current mode of capitalism in crisis – a perspective that is either the filter for revealing spectres, or is perhaps itself a powerful phantom. As for my 'self', and its appearance within these appearances – as it is the explicator attempting to explicate Tronti's explication of Marx's great explication – the basic aim is to draw out some key categories in terms of understanding the role of the 'worker' (individual, socialised, mass), as well as potential forms of agency, in the projected social-factory.

.....

Tronti begins the text discussing "both sides of capitalist production and therefore both standpoints ... from which the capitalist form of commodity production can be viewed; the **labour-process** (Arbeitsprozess) and the **valorization-process** (Verwertungsprozess)."

In the [labour-process] the worker handles the means of production not as capital, rather the worker *consumes* them as the material of his/her productive activity; in the [valorization-process] it is no longer "the worker who employs the means of production, but the means of production which employ the worker" capital therefore *consumes* labour-power. In fact, it is already in the labour-process that capital develops its command over labour, over labour-power and therefore over the worker,

however it is only in the valorization-process that it transforms into a coercive relationship, that forces the working-class to surplus labour,¹⁰ and so to the production of surplus value.¹¹ [Tronti, 1962]

It is important to bear in mind that these two processes are *standpoints* from which to view a single process; commodity production - however it is the interrelatedness of these perspectives that is central to Tronti's main theses. In this depiction, the means of production (capital) must consume the worker as "the ferment necessary to their own life-process" (Marx) – capital thus cannot exist without workers, upon whom it depends. So within the labour-process capital can simply command or manage work, but on this level the value that is produced is only equivalent to the value of labour-power (e.g. only enough value is produced to pay the worker for the expended time). It is from the standpoint of the valorization-process that extra value needs to be produced, value which then becomes capital (e.g. value that is invested into more means of production), without which there would in fact be no capital. Tronti puts it more simply in *The Strategy of Refusal*; "it is productive labour which produces capital" – "the idea that it is the "working people" who are the true "givers of labour" [is] ... untrue. The truth of the matter is that the person who provides labour is the capitalist. The worker is the *provider* of capital." [Tronti, 1980]

Human Capital does not Exist

A key differentiation within Tronti's work (and also central to Marxism) is between labour and labour-power; **labour** (work) is understood as the actual activity or effort of producing goods or services, **labour-power** as a person's ability to work, or their productive capability. To interpret this, one could say labour = work-act, and labour-power = work-capacity, the work-act thus contains the application of work-capacity (e.g. sufficient strength or knowledge). So when an employer hires a worker, the agreed upon wage is for the work-capacity, for the labour-power, which is itself the property of the worker, but the wage is paid only upon the *consumption* (as above) of that labour-power, and its subsequent transformation

¹⁰ Surplus labour means labour performed in excess of the labour necessary to produce the means of livelihood of the worker ("necessary labour"). According to Marxian economics, surplus labour is usually "unpaid labour".

¹¹ The role of consumption here maybe illicit a re-reading of critiques of consumer society from a social-factory perspective; is the purchase and consumption of a commodity also part of the labour-process? When US media urged people to 'shop for America', was this an instance of sending people 'back to work'? What does it mean to refuse to consume, when consumption is a structural component of production, not to simply boycott certain products or companies, but to view consumption as another place on the global assembly line?

into capital. This important distinction is in desperate need of revival today; *labour-power is finite* because it exists within the lifetime of the bearer, so in the act of working one's total labour-power is reduced, fundamentally in the expenditure of time, as well as in the expenditure of whatever energies, muscles etc. that are used up and need to be replaced or reproduced. If we contrast this notion of labour-power to the contemporary idea that free work, in its various forms (e.g. internships, company sponsored university courses), might contribute to or be an investment in one's 'cultural' or 'human' capital - so might be paid for at some unknown future point in time - the fact that this work is being exploited in the present is made more obvious – it is not simply that one works for free, but that a certain quantity of labour-power (and its necessary replacement) is lost for good.

On this point one might imagine a protest similar to that of the 19th century textile workers who threw the first machines into the street¹² (or said differently; who rebelled against machines that manifested their past work in the form of fixed capital) – a generation of workers who rebel against their own resumé and Curricula Vitae¹³ or against the fact that they represent labour-power in its mystified form as capital, which if sufficiently built up (by expending labour-power without payment) will yield returns in the future. The concepts of human and cultural capital blot out any idea of labour-power, and posit workers as the owners of capital, something Marx provides a critique of:

Apologetic economists... say:... [the worker's] labour-power, then, represents his capital in commodity-form, which yields him a continuous revenue. Labour-power is indeed his property (ever self-renewing, reproductive), not his capital. It is the only commodity which he can and must sell continually in order to live, and which acts as capital (variable) only in the hands of the buyer, the capitalist. The fact that a man is

¹² “The government of this future was left in the hands of a new species of manager: the techno totalitarians. We paid a heavy price, they remembered the great workers revolts of the 80s and 90s, and their repression. They are talked about now with the same condescension used to describe the textile workers who threw the first machines into the street in the 19th century. Progress was not brought to the poor but to those who had shown it to them.” Voice over narration from Chris Marker's past, present & future filmic assemblage of the history of the trade-union movement; *2084: Video clip pour une réflexion syndicale et pour le plaisir*, released in October, 1984 for the Nyon Film Festival in France.

Also in relation to this comment see E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working-class*, where he presents an alternative view of the Luddite movement, arguing that it was not simply a result of the fear of technological change, but a struggle against a newly-introduced economic system. Luddite raids on workshops would destroy certain frames whilst others (whose owners were obeying the old economic practice and not trying to cut prices) were left untouched. Thompson argues that Luddites were not opposed to new technology in itself, but rather to the abolition of set prices and therefore also to the introduction of the free market. The Luddites were penalized - either by being sent as prisoners to Australia or they were executed - after the introduction of the 'Frame Breaking Act' which, for the first time, identified industrial sabotage as a capital offence. (Capital in a doubled sense in this case).

¹³ Perhaps the German term is more appropriate here; a rebellion against one's *Lebenslauf*, literally translated as the *run, work, or course of life*.

continually compelled to sell his labour-power, i.e., himself, to another man proves, according to those economists, that he is a capitalist, because he constantly has “commodities” (himself) for sale. In that sense a slave is also a capitalist, although he is sold by another once and for all as a commodity; for it is in the nature of this commodity, a labouring slave, that its buyer does not only make it work anew every day, but also provides it with the means of subsistence that enable it to work ever anew.” – [Marx, *Capital*, vol. II, chapter 20, section 10]

To stress this point, labour-power cannot be ‘human capital’ as it is inherent to the body of the worker, it is not possible for a worker to sell their labour-power outside of their own body, it cannot be sold outside of itself. So when one designates what is in fact, labour-power, as capital, it becomes a case of workers, who are now capitalists, needing to ‘invest’ in their ‘capital’ (e.g. in their education), instead of recognising the actual production process whereby labour-power is used up and needs to be replaced.¹⁴

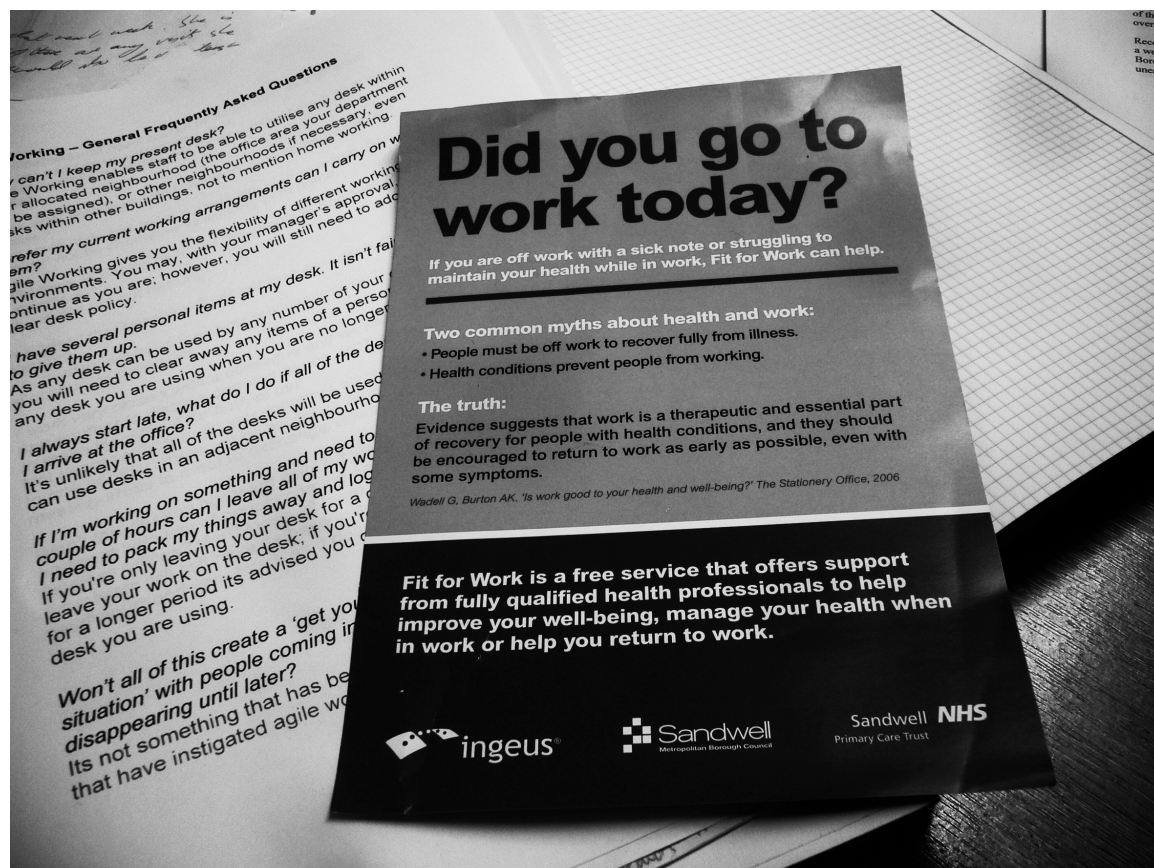
A particularly deranged example of this, from the UK government’s war against time off work, is the replacement of the ‘sick-note’ provided by a doctor to show that one requires time *away* from work, with the ‘fit-note’:

Evidence shows that work is generally good for your health and that often going back to work can actually aid a person’s recovery. On the other hand, staying off work can lead to long-term absence and job loss with the risk of isolation, loss of confidence, mental health issues, de-skilling and social exclusion. [Department for Work and Pensions, 2010, <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote/>]

The threat posed by this statement is explicit; not showing up for work = “job loss” on the one hand, “mental health issues” or “isolation” on the other. The way the ‘fit-note’ system works is that after a visit to a doctor, instead of receiving a confirmation for time off work, the patient receives instructions to give to their employer, who should then modify the situation at work so as to aid the recovery process. Placing this statement in the context of an expanded social-factory setting, where being outside of the wage relation means being exploited **and**

¹⁴ One of the most extreme examples of this perspective within the factory setting, and by no means an isolated incident, is the case of Zhang Guo Hua “a 40 year old Chinese man, who entered the UK illegally and who died in Hartlepool after working a 24 hour shift in a plastics ‘feeder’ factory for Samsung.” See John Barker’s *Cheap Chinese*, Mute Magazine, 2006, <http://www.metamute.org/en/Cheap-Chinese>
For a more detailed Marxian perspective of ‘human capital’ see; *The Problem with Human Capital Theory – A Marxian Critique*, by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, The American Economic Review, Vol. 65, No. 2, May 1975, p.74-82, <http://www.santafe.edu/~bowles/ProblemHumanCapital1975.pdf>
George Caffentzis’ *Throwing Away the Ladder* (1975) also criticizes human capital and its use within educational discourse.

not getting paid, the twisted logic that the waged workplace is ‘good for your health’ almost makes sense.¹⁵



Michelle Letowska, *Survey of Planner's Attitudes*, 2010 – Published in *Neither Shoreditch nor Manhattan*, Multistory, 2011, within the project *Black Country creative advantage* by Monika Vykoukal – www.blackcountrycreativeadvantage.org

The lack of the idea that something like labour-power might actually exist is striking here, and its absence is something that urgently needs addressing. The most obvious ignorance of this formulation is the extent to which ‘work’ is the *cause* of illness in the first place, not its cure – a fact well documented for example by the proliferation of repetitive strain injury – an illness

¹⁵ Although read in social-factory terms, the truth of this statement is revealed in its reversal: Evidence shows that work is generally **bad** for your health and that often going back to work can actually **worsen** a person's **medical condition**. On the other hand, staying off work can lead to **happiness** and **joy** with the **benefit** of **increased fulfillment of creative goals**, **heightened confidence**, **psychological stability**, as well as **more time for family and community activity**.

“**question:** can one live without working? **answer:** we can only live without working. We only work through necessity, to survive. Life starts when one stops working. Work is incompatible with life which is essentially creative. Life is a permanent invention, survival is nothing but a monotonous work of reproduction.” Raoul Vaneigem in an interview with *The Idler*, no. 35.

that more ‘work’ will not succeed in curing, and one upon which a lot of money is spent in order to prove that it doesn’t exist.¹⁶ What this also demonstrates is a capitalist view of production whereby the process of valorization becomes devoid of any notion that labour-power needs to be reproduced at all,¹⁷ a perspective that necessarily leads to loss of confidence, social exclusion, mental health problems, burn-out or ultimately death.

Notes on *Verwertung*

One aspect of the general translation of Marx’s term *verwertungsprozess*, as *valorization*, is that *ver-wert-ung*, already implies that something is lost or taken away; *wert* meaning value, and the prefix ‘ver-’ inferring (but not always) negativity, or loss, the english term however doesn’t implicitly replicate this sense that something is lost or used up in the process of generating value. *Verwertung* then implies the use or application of something (object, process or activity) in making money or generating value, and Marx identifies the ‘something’ that is lost as labour-power, the fact that a person’s productive capability has been partially expended;

Labour-power, however, becomes a reality only by its exercise; it sets itself in action only by working. But thereby a definite quantity of human muscle, nerve, brain, &c., is wasted, and these require to be restored. [Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, chapter 6: The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power]

Within the production process then, there is an inherent sense that work, seen from the viewpoint of the worker, is also *de-valued*, or is part of a *de-valorization-process*, something that is picked up by Harry Cleaver - citing the work of Ivan Illich - as *desvalor* or *disvalue*;

This concept has a theoretical content very close to what one might look for as an inversion of “valorization. [...] Related to Marx's analysis of the alienation of the producer from both the labor-process and the product but emphasizing the experience of people as consumers being dominated by their alienated products rather than as alienated laborers producing those products, Illich described the growing "disvalue" of peoples' helplessness and dependency on commodities and professionals, i.e., on market supplied services. In some ways his concept of "disvalue" expresses the same phenomena neoclassical economics call "negative externalities" --or the "disutility" which emerges as byproducts of market production-- such as pollution whose nasty

¹⁶ See John Barker’s *Intensities of Labour; From Amphetamine to Cocaine*, published in Mute Magazine

¹⁷ Or as the RuthlessCriticism blog puts it; “So: the worker gets sick and who suffers? Only the company!”
[“Working while sick poses risks” – For who really? <http://ruthlesscriticism.com/worksick.htm>]

effects have no price and therefore tend to be ignored in a market economy.” [Cleaver, 1992]

In a way Cleaver misses the double-sidedness of the original *Verwertung*, that it is at once the creation of value as well as the necessary expenditure or loss of labour-power – that it is both valorization and dis-valorization simultaneously depending on one’s perspective;

That is to say if *valorization* denotes the capitalist subordination of human productive activities to capitalist command, then *disvalorization* expresses people’s loss of those abilities which are absorbed by capital. [Ibid.]

What he does also importantly point out is that this ‘absorption’ (or subsumption) occurs not only directly in the process of creating value, so as the worker works – but also in the way capital increasingly appropriates this work by replacing or dominating it, for example, with new technology. Illich recognises this process within “the monopolization of the skills of learning by professional teachers, and the monopolization of the skills of healing by health professionals” [Ibid.].¹⁸ Disvalue then “bespeaks the wasting of the commons and culture with the result that traditional labour is voided of its power to generate subsistence” [Hoinacki & Mitcham, 2002, p.77]. In pursuing social-factory-workers’ inquiries then, Illich’s focus on the phenomena of *disvalue* might be an interesting path of investigation; to engage in a phenomenological approach to that which the social-factory produces, exchanges, consumes and distributes, a critical analysis of how the social-factory manifests itself in everyday life, in terms of *verwertung*, the extraction/destruction of various forms of value.¹⁹

Capitalist Inversion

Capital views the labour-process *solely* as the valorization-process, labour-power *solely* as capital; it inverts the relationship between living and dead labour, between value-generating force and value: that suits it better, the more it can **bring the entire societal labour-process into the valorization-process of capital**, the more it can *integrate* labour-power within capital. [Tronti, 1962]

¹⁸ Cleaver cites Ivan Illich’s; *Deschooling Society*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, New York: Pantheon, 1976, and *Disabling Professions*, London: Marion Boyars, 1977.

¹⁹ One question then in terms of the hypothesized social-factory would be, what are the social means of production? That is which means of production are employed on the level of society in general? Not to ignore the fact that classical forms of work still employ means of production, but if the factory has dissolved, then the category of the ‘expanded means of production’ is an important one. Debt, and the many forms it has taken, seems to be the most obvious method for this. Perhaps looking more closely at the autonomist version of ‘social capital’ would also provide some answers.

Tronti identifies what could be called the ‘capitalist inversion’, or “production turned on its head” - the perspective from which labour and labour-power appear to function only in valorizing capital, thus are already ‘capital’ themselves; so living labour – work done in the moment of production – appears already dead, in as much as it is seen *solely* as creating surplus value, as the valorization of capital, (maybe also in this sense living labour only really manifests itself within the valorization-process when it withdraws its productive complicity). Living labour’s role as value-generating force appears only as value, as already *being* capital. What the valorization viewpoint misses then (in this simplistic understanding) is the necessary labour, the work done in order to reproduce the conditions of work and the workers themselves, and so attempts to bring the societal labour-process more integrally into the valorization-process. Here we perhaps begin to see what drives the expansion of the factory and the transformation of society, **the attempt to integrate processes that remain outside of the valorization-process**. This could be understood in a number of ways;²⁰ the General Agreement on Trades in Services (GATS – World Trade Organisation agreement from 1995 signed by 140 member nations) in its general attempt to subject various aspects of life to the rules of international trade by re-defining them as ‘services’ that can be traded (education for example); also perhaps within the ongoing process of *enclosure* and privatization of vital common resources – which itself takes many diverse forms, from water privatization to environmental depletion and the current war being waged on what was left of the welfare state. An example that relates to the later discussion of Wages for Housework was described by Selma James in an article for the *Guardian* in 2010, highlighting the transnational dimension of what is currently happening in many parts of the world; “structural adjustment policies, that is, the privatisation and cuts which devastated the developing world in the 80s and 90s, were based on women taking on even more unwaged work or going without – even when it meant starvation. In much the same way, the "big society" plans **to drive women to replace decimated services with unwaged work**.”²¹ Tronti seems to suggest that social reforms (incl. the welfare state) are a historically anomalous recognition of the importance of the labour-process by the social-democratic/keynesian state, but that they don’t directly

²⁰ Other ways of understanding this process of ‘incorporating’ (or destroying) various socially necessary labour-processes within the valorization-process, include Rosa Luxemburgs conception of *primitive accumulation*, as well as Achille Mbembe’s *necropolitics* and Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee’s *necrocapitalism*, all of which point out the extent to which capitalism is, what John Barker refers to as a “killing system”.

²¹ Selma James, *The Tory 'big society' relies on women replacing welfare*, The Guardian, October 2010 – “The Big Society”, concocted by politicians in the UK (the ‘con-dem’ government), seems to be a return to the idea of ‘society’, famously rejected by former conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher, albeit to replace the wealth [est. \$2.7 trillion] transferred to the financial sector, with the free labour of families and communities. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/21/spending-review-taxandspending/print>

valorize capital because they firstly serve the reproduction of the work force. This is not to say that social reforms are not capitalist, but that capital must favour the valorization-process as it is the “ferment” or “life-blood” of capital itself. Tronti states that within;

... the bourgeois mystification of capitalist relations these processes run parallel and combined, they appear *both* objective and necessary. Against this however, it's necessary to **see them separately but as a unit**, until the point at which they confront each other as contradictions, when they mutually exclude each other: the material lever for the dissolution of capital, the one placed at the decisive point of the system. [Tronti 1962]

It is then only by viewing the labour and valorization-processes as connected, but separate that one can fully understand the revolutionary potentials within this relation. This is a crucial point, and one that perhaps helps to understand the present crises - as capital increases the process of e.g. enclosing commons, destroying the remnants of various social systems (integrating the labour-process into the valorization-process), it necessarily enters crises because it transforms processes of socially necessary labour into valorization-processes, it therefore removes the basis of its own production, precisely because of the incessant drive towards valorization. With that impetus then comes an *increase in the contradictions between the processes*, and their eventual mutual exclusion; capital because it needs to integrate the labour-process ever more completely, thus increasingly dominating society and social life; labour because within this process its productive power is necessarily increased (although this last point definitely needs to be re-examined and considered in relation to the idea of ‘underdevelopment’). The process that Selma James points to, is perhaps a good way of understanding these points. ‘The state’ - in what is already a decades long process - is being downsized and privatized, the social pact that existed within the post-war Keynesian approach, wasn’t so much destroyed as taken to its logical conclusion by neoliberal doctrine - itself no longer able to exercise any ideological sovereignty, as it becomes undeniable that the neoliberal project was solely one of consolidating and re-affirming class domination (Fisher, Harvey); the current scenario seems aptly described by Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘anarchy of capitalism’, and importantly in reference to the unpaid work of women, her specific notion of ‘primitive accumulation’.²² One might even warily state that perhaps this point of

²² Primitive accumulation isn’t directly dealt with by Tronti, but it is an important element of Luxemburg’s overall analysis in her major work *Accumulation of Capital*, (Berlin, Buchhandlung Vorwärts Paul Singer G.m.b.H., 1913) and her *Anti-Kritik* written in 1915 while interned in the women’s prison, Barnimstrasse, Berlin; *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder Was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben. Eine Antikritik* (Leipzig, Franke, 1921). For Marx, it was the initial act of violent expropriation or theft by which capitalism was born. A common example was violently divorcing peasants from their traditional means of self-

contradiction has been reached, or at least that another step has been taken in its direction. As the state arguably takes a backseat (or becomes completely indistinguishable from the needs of capital), Tronti's formulation seems interesting to consider; "One of the highest and most developed points of the class struggle will be precisely the frontal clash between the *factory*, as *working-class* and *society*, as *capital*." [Tronti, 1980]



UK Conservative Party positioning itself not as 'government' but as part of a 'big society' ("*society*, as *capital*"?).

sufficiency, for example through vagabondage laws, or stealing common lands and using it for profitable wool production. "Your sheep [...] become so great devourers and so wild, that they eat up, and swallow down the very men themselves. They consume, destroy, and devour whole fields, houses, and cities." [Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1516]. Luxemburg crucially pointed out that this form of capital accumulation was not only an initial act of creating capital, preceding more rational forms of accumulation (Marx), but was a central and continuous process within capitalist 'development'. This allowed Luxemburg to see the structural role of imperialism within capitalism, not as a process of exporting production or the working-class (Lenin), but the continual process of loot and expropriation, as an ongoing and central component of capital. This concept has been developed in many different ways; it is an important element within Feminist-Marxism and the concept of 'underdevelopment', as well as within the contemporary discourse on the new commons and enclosures. Loren Goldner, defines primitive accumulation today as follows; "When Western capital sucks Third World labour-power, whose costs of reproduction it did not pay for, into the world division of labour, whether in Indonesia or in Los Angeles, that's primitive accumulation. When capital loots the natural environment and does not pay the replacement costs for that damage, that's primitive accumulation. When capital runs capital plant and infrastructure into the ground (the story of much of the US and UK economies since the 1960s that's primitive accumulation. When capital pays workers non-reproductive wages, (wages too low to produce a new generation or workers) that's primitive accumulation too." [Loren Goldner, *Fictitious Capital for Beginners*, Mute Magazine, 2007, <http://www.metamute.org/en/Fictitious-Capital-For-Beginners>]

The Absence of Labour(-Power)

Within the ‘capitalist inversion’ of the production process, Tronti emphasizes the role of *past work*, which, transformed daily into capital, is re-channelled, in the form of means of production, back into the living labour-process;

... past work, like some force of nature, performs a **service free of cost**; if it is invested and set into motion by living labour, past work accumulates and reproduces itself on an expanded scale as capital. What’s more difficult is the elucidation of the procedure, **as living labour itself is wholly incorporated into this process as a necessary component of its own development**. “It is the natural property of living labour to keep old value in existence, while it creates new.” Therefore “labour maintains and perpetuates an always increasing capital-value in an ever renewed form.” In particular, as the effectiveness, scope and value of the means of production increases, so too advances the development of the productive forces necessary for accumulation. “This **natural power of labour** appears as a power incorporated into capital for the latter’s own self-preservation, just as the productive forces of social labour appear as inherent characteristics of capital, and just as the constant appropriation of surplus labour by the capitalists appears as the constant self-valorization of capital. **All the forces of labour project themselves as forces of capital**. [Tronti, 1962]

Tronti’s critique begins to become more specific; in the entangled relation between work and valorization, living labour consumes the means of production (a product of past work), and so handles that past work/old value in order to create new. On the one hand past work loses its former identity as work, re-appearing as a natural force and as capital, on the other the ‘natural power’ of living labour, in the development of its productive forces appears as a dependent component of capital. Tronti seems to be focussing on ‘productive’ labour here, but a clear division between productive and reproductive labour already seems to start unravelling, at least from a collective-capitalist viewpoint; if past work re-appears as a force of nature, the question is opened, what other elements of the production cycle are also similarly mystified, and similarly ‘productive’? What other work goes unpaid whilst being a central component of the production process?

Marx rightly says that the value of labour is an imaginary term,²³ an irrational definition, a manifestation of those fundamental relations that describe the notion of

²³ “...we must turn our attention to the specific *value of labour*. And here, again, I must startle you by a seeming paradox. All of you feel sure that what they daily sell is their Labour; that, therefore, Labour has a price, and that, the price of a commodity being only the monetary expression of its value, there must certainly exist such a

the “value of labour-power.” Yet, what is the necessity of this manifestation? Is it a question of a subjective decision, of *hiding* the nature of the actual relations, or is it not much more the real method by which the mechanism of this relationship *functions*. [Ibid.]

More than simply hiding the role of labour-power, of consciously or subjectively suppressing the fact that labour-power constitutes capital itself; the *absence* or *invisibility* of labour-power, within the notion of the ‘value of labour’ and its manifestation in the wage, is the functional element of the production process.

Exemplary here is how the value and cost of labour-power present themselves in the mutated form of wages. Just as the real action of wages seems to show not that the value of labour-power is paid, but rather the value of its function, the value of labour itself. For capitalist production it is **essential that labour-power appears purely and simply as labour**, and that the value of labour is paid in the form of wages. [Ibid.]

The functional aspect of ‘labour’ here, and its false value-equivalent, the wage, lies in the fact that it obscures the actual relations of production and the role of labour-power. For Tronti, and subsequently for the entire autonomist project, this *absence of labour-power* from the production process, is also the absence of the potential of the economic category ‘labour-power’, becoming the political category ‘working-class’. Relating this again to Wages For Housework, or unpaid reproductive labour in general, the question then also concerns the *absence of labour*, or the way that many forms of labour are not recognised or accepted as such - which despite the negative connotation of wage labour in Tronti (to the extent that the wage is the tool that obscures labour-power), for unpaid workers the wage is also a first step in the process of refusing work. Firstly because it makes e.g. housework visible as a form of work, and secondly because it helps to provide the material conditions from which one can refuse (this is encapsulated perhaps in the title of one essay by Silvia Federici; *Wages against Housework* [Federici, 1975]).

thing as the *value of labour*. However, there exists no such thing as the *value of labour*... To say that the value of a ten hours working day is equal to ten hours' labour, or the quantity of labour contained in it, would be a tautological and, moreover, a nonsensical expression. Of course, having once found out the true but hidden sense of the expression “*value of labour*”... What the working man sells is not directly his *labour*, but his *labouring power*, the temporary disposal of which he makes over to the capitalist ... certainly by some Continental Laws, the *maximum time* is fixed for which a man is allowed to sell his labouring power. If allowed to do so for any indefinite period whatever, slavery would be immediately restored. Such a sale, if it comprised his lifetime, for example, would make him at once the lifelong slave of his employer.” Marx, *Economic Manuscripts: Value, Price and Profit*, VII Labour-power - <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch02.htm> - Basically interpreted, work is more than a simple commodity, it is both labour and labour-power.

The value of labour-power simultaneously expresses, through the *wage*, the capitalist form of the exploitation of work and its bourgeois mystification; it shows us the *being* of capitalist relations of production, *turned upside down*. *Labour* on this basis becomes the **necessary mediation** for the transformation of labour-power into wages: the requirement that living labour *alone* present itself as variable capital,²⁴ labour-power alone as *part* of capital. The value represented by the paid part of the working day **must therefore appear as the value or price of the entire working day**. It is precisely within the wage that every trace of the division of the working day, into necessary and surplus labour, disappears. **All work appears as paid work**; but that is what differentiates *wage labour* from all other historical forms of labour. The more capitalist production and its system of productive forces develop, **the more the paid and unpaid components of work intermingle in an inseparable way**. [Tronti, 1962]

Again Tronti identifies the diminished role of labour-power, now in that it is represented as *part* of capital and because it is mediated simply as *labour*, and so as the wage. The wage relation then posits a value for ‘labour’, and so sidesteps the full extent of the value of labour-power. Thus the wages given to any worker, although necessarily only part of the value produced, appear as an equivalent value for the entire working period. So the difference between the work done in order for the workers’ reproduction (necessary labour) and the work that directly produces surplus value (surplus labour), begins to disappear, as the labour-process is swallowed completely by the valorization-processes. This is a two sided process; ‘work’, is seemingly reduced, followed by reduced remuneration of workers. The outcome then - that *all work appears as paid work*, is precisely the mystification that serves to hide the socially necessary labour, which is precisely the obfuscation that autonomia, as well as Wages For Housework tried to destroy, and which remains a crucial political task. We might add that as paid and unpaid work inseparably intermingle, perhaps then so too does the clear distinction between productive and reproductive labour, and a clear theoretical basis for an expanded notion of the ‘working-class’ emerges.

²⁴ Constant capital is the value of goods and materials required to produce a commodity, while variable capital is the wages paid for the production of a commodity. Marx introduced this distinction because it is only labour-power which creates new value. Variable capital means that proportion of capital which is invested in wages, in the purchase of labour-power. Marx called this capital “variable” because it is this proportion of capital which, if it is used wisely may produce a new, surplus value in the course of the labour-process, over and above the “necessary labour time” which the worker needs to live and is paid in the form of wages. This investment is the only one which creates new value, because the worker is able to produce more than he needs in order to live. (<http://www.marxists.org/glossary>)

Autonomist Inversion

The outcome of this de-mystification, or the autonomist “inversion”, of the production process then posits a key way of (re-)thinking capitalism; not a capitalist class constantly developing its domination over the work force, but an expanded working-class that necessarily holds the initiative (although is perhaps unaware of the fact, or prevented from making use of it);

The struggle of the working-class has forced capitalists to change the form of their domination. This means that the pressure of **labour-power can compel capital to change its internal composition; it takes effect within capital as a fundamental component of capitalist development**; it drives capitalist production forward from within, until that production has overflowed [übergegangen] into all the external relations of social life. What appears, in the highest stage of development, to be a spontaneous function of workers, in view of disintegrated working conditions and integrated capital, appears in a further retarded [zurückgebliebenen] stage as the legal necessity of a social limit, that hinders the dissipation of labour-power and whose specific capitalist exploitation it should simultaneously account for. The political mediation takes up completely, in both these moments, a thoroughly individual, specific place. It is nowhere written that the political ground of the bourgeoisie will remain, always and forever, under the *sky* of bourgeois society. [Ibid.]

In *Lenin in England*, written for the first issue of *Classe Operaia (Working-Class)* in 1964, and later republished in *Operai e capitale*, as *A New Style of Political Experiment*, Tronti introduced the operaist project along similar lines;

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working-class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working-class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned. [Tronti, 1979]

To summarize then this autonomist inversion as it is presented by Tronti in *Society and Factory*, and to recap in terms of understanding the mechanics of the social-factory - the basis is the fundamental discovery of labour-power as a political force.²⁵ Crucial in recognizing this, is the viewpoint of the labour-process, which recognizes necessary, as well as surplus

²⁵ “Labour as labour-force already existed in Hegel, labour-force as commodity already existed in Ricardo. The commodity labour-force as a class of workers: this is Marx's discovery.” Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy*, quoting Tronti, *Forza-lavoro classe operaia*, in *Operai e capitale*, p.128

labour - necessary labour being the constitutive element of the reproduction (thus existence) of labour-power; surplus labour as the *provider* and basis for the production of capital. Tronti lays out in great detail the functional necessity for capital to obscure the presence of labour-power within the production process - explicitly manifest in the wage in that it presents only “the value of labour”, thus creating the appearance that all ‘work’ (in the strict sense) is paid work - and perhaps also manifest today in terms such as ‘human capital’. Importantly, Tronti shows that this is more than a question of simply *hiding* the role of labour-power; its absence is functional to capital itself precisely because this absence obscures the difference between necessary and surplus labour, it steamrolls necessary labour and labour-power flat within the valorization-process *because* they are the conditions of its existence. Labour-power is that which capital must constantly develop (to exist), as it is the “ferment” of its existence, and simultaneously must constantly obscure (the role of labour-power within the process) because it is potentially the “material lever for the dissolution of capital.” Tronti, in this de-mystification, recognises (following Marx) the political strength of labour-power, in its existence as the working-class, and subsequently the prominence of working-class struggles in re-composing capital from within.

On this point its interesting to consider to what extent the shifts in ‘higher’ and ‘further’ education in Europe, partly manifested in the *Bologna Process*, are the result of past working-class (incl. student) struggles – in a sense many of the educational demands of the 60s were met, albeit in twisted forms; broadened access, but mostly via subjection to student-loans (or differently said; selling ones imagined future work in exchange for an education); reduced division between manual and intellectual labour as ‘student’ becomes the mainstay for the service sector, and ‘worker’, in the face of de-skilling and along the lines of ‘life-long learning’, comes to mean continual reliance on access to education for top-ups of certain knowledges and skills.

Society of the Factory

To relate this back to the subject of this section; the social-factory – in the process summarized above, capital, responding to working-class struggle (the political manifestation of labour-power), must increasingly dominate and integrate labour-power, which entails a socialization of the valorization-process or the construction of a socially expanded production

site (the integration of various people, sites, processes etc. within the direct production of surplus value/capital),²⁶ however within that process the factory or office (as we knew it) seemingly disappears:

The more the specific relations of capitalist production take possession of societal relations in general, the more its marginally distinctive features seem to disappear. The more capitalist production deeply permeates, to its fullest extent, the totality of societal relations, the more society appears as a totality in relation to production, and production as a specific characteristic in relation to society. [Tronti, 1962]

One question that arises then is whether the recognition of the now invisible factory within the totality of this capitalist society is perhaps synonymous with the recognition of labour-power within the production process. If this is the case then one can posit a direct connection between the process of dominating and hiding labour-power, and the apparent *disappearance* of the factory. The recognition of labour-power as the functionally absent, hidden element of the production process firstly points in the direction of the broader process of the reproduction of that labour-power, and secondly it shows that in the formal relation between *workers and capital*, the process of ever more completely integrating the work-force, necessitates the socialization of production.

The more capitalist development advances, i.e. the more the production of relative surplus value prevails and expands, the more the cycle; production - distribution - exchange - consumption, necessarily comes together; as does the relationship between capitalist production and bourgeois society, between the factory and society, between society and the state. [Ibid.]

To comprehend this within what has thus far been discussed, “the more the production of relative surplus value prevails and expands” means also as the valorization process conquers those areas not necessarily included in the creation of surplus value (perhaps this is also what Tronti later refers to as the “internal colonization” process), the difference between, for example, production and consumption is swallowed by valorization; the production of surplus value – and it is within this that factory and society – society and state, merge.

²⁶ Would Tronti then include housework within this conception? Strictly speaking it seems he would not, as it is by firstly creating the idea that housework is a natural force, by ignoring the labour-process and mystifying its productive role, that houseworkers are then also expected to directly valorize capital by getting waged work as well. This taps into a massive amount of research that has gone into showing the decline of the middle class since the 1950s (particularly in the US and Europe), and the increasing poverty/reliance on credit, even among double income households, see for instance, the lecture “The Coming Collapse of the Middle Class” by Elizabeth Warren: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akVL7QY0S8A>

At the highest stage of capitalist development, social relations become **moments of the relations of production**, and the whole of society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society. [Ibid.]

Here we have perhaps Tronti's clearest explication of the social-factory; the factory, which in a sense has then disappeared (complicit in the process of hiding/dominating/integrating labour-power), has in fact extended its formerly "exclusive domination" beyond the factory walls. One of the central questions, as previously mentioned, for this entire investigation, is *how the social-factory churns?*²⁷ What are the explicit manifestations of this in the contemporary era? This is asked not because of a lack of examples, but in order to keep an open mind towards what are diverse and often-changing conditions of 'work' (in the expanded sense). The first response to this, however, in regards the dispersal of the factory, is to disregard the factory as such, in order to re-locate it in the societal production process (this would not exclude the historical analysis of 'the factory', but view it from a social-factory perspective). In this sense it seems imprecise to state today that the school or university is a factory, as this serves (at least metaphorically) to ignore the *permeability* of the walls, or the *dispersion* of its 'productivity' – the edu-institution is a key site within an expanded capitalist production process (nowadays both directly and indirectly), and it is within this expanded field that forms of agency, as well as new solidarities are to be looked for. If this is read within the discourse on institutional critique (and its already long-term crisis) perhaps there's a need to accept that the institution does not exist, in order that it be possible to find it again in the process of societal/social (re)production (the ambiguity of taking on this perspective however, is that it entails applying the same one used in the capitalist educational reform process).

²⁷ A *churn* is a vessel that is spun to produce certain products (e.g. butter), for stockbrokers it means to cause a heavy turnover in the portfolio of an investor. *To churn out*, implies a a mechanical, hurried, or routine production process – here its used to imply a rapid dizzying production process that is difficult to recognize; if one is inside the churn of the social-factory, its hard to see exactly how it churns. This is not, however, the perfect analogy, as the inside/outside relation is, as we shall see, a little more complex.



Middlesex University protest and occupation, May 2010

The Impoverishment of Philosophy & ‘I Want to be More Employable’

In May 2010, the management at Middlesex University, UK, announced the closure of its European Philosophy program (the only one in the UK), making it yet another victim of cuts in the humanities over the past few years, as well as part of what seems to be an increasing tendency by university administrations to close down philosophy departments (and other subjects designated as ‘Band D’) as part of a larger and growing anti-humanities tendency. It was followed by a number of protests and an occupation of one of the department buildings, which in turn was evicted by the police, and several students and staff members were suspended. The image above, and the slogan ‘THE UNIVERSITY IS A FACTORY, STRIKE! OCCUPY!’ has generated some interesting reflections on the universities role as a ‘factory’, and the campaign to save this fairly renowned philosophy department received a large amount of support from around the world, including a letter signed by many celebrity

philosophers including Etienne Balibar, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Kristin Ross, Toni Negri and Jacques Rancière.

The use of the ‘university is a factory’ banner, “hanging above a neoclassical statue with fist pumped into the air”, Sebastian Wright comments, “endowed the campaign with an uncompromising, industrial proletariat aesthetic that served to reinforce its militant credentials.” From the perspective of the outlined social-factory, what this slogan does, is re-localize the site of production, which on the one hand is a necessary starting point for university struggles, to recognise their role in the more expansive social-factory, with students’ recognition of themselves as workers in the present (as well as in the future); on the other hand however the idea that the university is a factory is false to the extent that as a site of “exclusive domination” it has already been subsumed in a broader societal production process, its ‘factory walls’ have already been knocked down, and reconstructed to suit the flows and business interests of capital. Wright goes on to state that the slogan was not taken literally enough as, inevitably, “educational idealism crept back into the vocabulary – talk of the department’s outstanding research scores, of the nobility of the humanities against the dehumanizing levelling of business utility thinking” and the focus of various speeches (incl. by Tariq Ali and Paul Gilroy) on “the need to fight for “high quality education.”” The conclusion of the campaign was the relocation of the course to Kingston University “leaving some lecturers and all of the undergraduate students behind” which “reflected the drift towards the idealism of research over and above the University as a site of industrial struggle.”²⁸ With these comments in mind, the idea that the university is a factory, simply becomes a means to re-create exclusivity, one that re-discovers itself in outmoded ideas of ‘excellence’ and ‘achievement’, instead of, as the *Communiqué from an Absent Future* puts it, pushing the university struggle to its limit. This process of locating the university in its dispersed role within the “industrial struggle” or within the expanded conditions of work and production, is the necessary corollary to the university as factory (one which is admittedly not easy to express in slogan form).²⁹

²⁸ Sebastian Wright, *The University is a Factory, Lets Treat it like One*, published in *The Commune*, 2010 <http://occupyca.wordpress.com/2010/10/01/the-university-is-a-factory-lets-treat-it-like-one/>

²⁹ One, as yet, unrealized idea is to set up a website for the creation, archiving, and specification of certain political slogans, taking up what was for Jean-Paul Sartre a crucial political concern; how to dilute the complexity of political ideas to simple slogans. In this regard one might also consider how today complex political ideas might be expressed via twitter, or even more difficult, in txtspk.

In a similar vein; during the education protests in Vienna in 2009, there were, on one evening, inter-institutional general assemblies at various universities where the ‘name’ of the movement should be decided (a practical task to have a common website), the main proposal was for the name ‘unsere uni’ (our uni) which, during the assembly at which I was present, was criticized, and changed to ‘deine uni’ (your uni). The proposal wasn’t

To dwell a little longer on the case of Middlesex University; two other phenomena – both bringing up interesting issues in relation to the present study – are worth mentioning. One a Middlesex University advertising poster, analyzed as part of an urban and architecturally focussed essay on the story, entitled; *A Suburban Occupation*. The other is the above-mentioned letter of support, published online by the *Times Higher Education* supplement, and signed by many of the worlds leading thinkers.

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Philosophical view: Middlesex, think again

6 May 2010

We the undersigned deplore Middlesex University's recent decision to close its philosophy programmes, including its prestigious and successful MAs. This is a matter of national and indeed international concern. Not only does it contradict Middlesex's stated commitment to promote "research excellence", it also represents a startling stage in the impoverishment of philosophy provision in the UK.

We have participated in events organised by the Philosophy Group at Middlesex and can testify to its unique strengths and its significant and distinctive contribution to philosophy in the UK. Its set of MA programmes is currently the largest in the country.

Philosophy is the highest-rated research subject at Middlesex. In the research assessment exercise 2008, it was rated first in philosophy among post-1992 universities, with 65 per cent of its research judged "world-leading" or "internationally excellent".

Middlesex is widely recognised as one of the most important centres for the study of modern European philosophy anywhere in the English-speaking world. It has one of only a handful of philosophy departments left in the UK that provides both research-driven and inclusive postgraduate teaching and supervision aimed at a wide range of students, specialist and non-specialist.

We call on Middlesex to reverse its damaging and ill-judged decision, and to renew its commitment to widening participation in education and excellence in research.



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accepted, but we felt that it better reflected the societal position of the university – not to posit it as the ‘property’ of students, or to re-create its exclusivity, as well as the dichotomy; students inside institution ↔ workers outside – but to state that it exists already within the social fabric, within flows of business, profit and work. The ruling image of the university then was of a fortress to be defended against the capitalist reformers outside its walls, so to call it ‘your uni’ would be to hand it completely over to capital interests.

Philosophical View? Institutionalized Philosophers, Think Again!

Ignoring the ubiquitous job/career announcements present on the above webpage, the *Times Higher Education* supplement also plays a significant role in contemporary higher education via the publication of its 'World University Rankings', which employs 'objective' categories such as; 'research income from industry', and 'amount of degrees awarded' (or number of graduates 'produced'), and is based on data collected from thousands of academics as well as 'global employers'. As is obvious from the outcome, the system is heavily biased towards the anglo-american university (18 of the top 20 universities are either US or UK institutions) and as some critics have argued is purely a way of constructing the supposed supremacy of these already renowned 'knowledge centres'. The *Times* is also famously part of Rupert Murdoch's media empire; News Corporation. In this context, the rare occasion of a collective and potentially political statement (or indeed *disagreement*) from so many leading philosophers, disappointingly vanishes into the chasm of this vast meritocracy – ruled by performance indicators, productivity and efficiency factors, and of course the obscure notions, 'quality assurance' and academic or research 'excellence'. The argument that emerges against the Philosophy Department's closure in the above letter, uses what could be called the 'language of excellence', that is, one assumes, the language that is perceived as being spoken by management and university administrations. Perhaps the most remarkable factor of the closure of this department, is that it had learnt, and also embodied this language, it was 'successful' according to the standards placed upon it; 65% of its research was deemed 'world-leading' or 'internationally excellent', it scored highly on the UK's notorious 'Research Assessment Exercise', and more than half of its research-generated income went back to the administration. All of this begs the question; not how such an *excellent* department could still be closed down, but what is the driving force or logic behind it? Who or what is "impoverishing philosophy," and why? Not in terms of simply ascertaining blame, but in terms of recognising a process of complicity that runs through the factory-like space of the university and the official hierarchies that are ultimately hierarchies dominated by capital and profit. This means, essentially, the process by which educational institutions blindly accept the demands of the 'economy' – in terms of employability, budgets, dwindling financial support etc. – instead of critically challenging this process, recognizing the university as an important social actor, investigating and organising beyond the factory walls, posing factors as simple as rising unemployment in the face of the demand to provide skills and careers. The fallout of critically challenging these processes has of course landed on those at the bottom of

this structure, the ones most acutely feeling the squeeze of these contradictions, in the case of Middlesex, the undergraduate students (although other students and staff were also affected), who have lost out whilst the “prestigious and successful MA courses” continue elsewhere. In terms of this “startling stage in the impoverishment of philosophy” one has to posit the poverty of philosophy³⁰ itself, in its subservient institutional form – that is the one represented in the above letter, solely by those within academic institutions – it is only able to respond with an answer that boils down to pointing out how well it has obeyed the anarchic dictates of capital, a prime example of philosophy’s lack of power, of its inability to translate its words into correlative political action. In fact, in this scene, the only character playing a philosophically consistent role is capital, closing down a perfectly productive factory (the philosophy department) simply because it sees better prospects elsewhere. As this process increases we can only hope that philosophy develops a more radical and effective approach than the complicitous one it has played up until now.³¹

Perhaps one basic perspective to pose concerning the transformation of the university, in the terms offered by Tronti, is a shift from labour-process to valorization-process, from site of reproduction (of ideology, class etc.), to one that is now *also* directly productive. Staff wages are depressed, or replaced by third-party funding/sponsorship as workloads increase (reproductive role of staff is *hidden/subsumed* in the direct work for sponsors), students increasingly work for companies involved within the university, as well as supplementary low-wage work outside (so take on a productive & reproductive function within the university, as well as doing productive work outside, and probably in many cases e.g. mothers, doing other forms of reproductive work outside). What it amounts to is an intensification of labour within the disintegration of the university as we knew it.

³⁰ For clarity, I am not arguing for some kind of ‘wealthy’ philosophy, following Rancière we might ask, if philosophy is being impoverished, who are its rich and poor? What is philosophy’s *wealth*? But, in fact, discussing this in terms of poverty and wealth seems to distract from the issue; in the face of capitalist reform can philosophers engage in a radically political approach? Or at least one that reflects their actual intellectual output? To move away from simple complicity and obedience? These questions are equally valid for educational institutions.

³¹ Signs of things to come perhaps can be found in the work of George Caffentzis who highlights other periods where intellectual life was forced outside of the universities; “In conclusion, the new horizon of academic freedom determined by the knowledge commons points towards a return to the original status of universities in the Medieval city: independent of church, market, and state and self-managed by students and faculty. Indeed, if this return is not accomplished, our universities may revert to the situation they were in between the Reformation and the French Revolution, i.e., as places evoking fear in thinkers. Indeed, almost every important intellectual from Copernicus to Hume, did his (and, of course, her) work outside of the walls of academe, since these walls had eyes and ears ready to report and punish any independent thought to the Church and State.” *Autonomous Universities and the Making of the Knowledge Commons*, Russell Scholar Lecture IV, Nov. 18, 2008, http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/caffentzis_autonomous-universities.pdf



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University

I WANT TO BE MORE EMPLOYABLE

I WANT TO DO MORE. I WANT THE BEST POSSIBLE START TO A PROFESSIONAL CAREER. I WANT TO EXCEED EXPECTATIONS. I WANT TO RIDE ON THE LONDON EYE. I WANT INDEPENDENCE. I WANT TO BE DISCOVERED. I WANT TO DO SOMETHING WORTHWHILE. I WANT TO SEE THINGS IN A NEW LIGHT. I WANT THE TOP MODELS TO WEAR THE CLOTHES I DESIGN. I WANT TO FURTHER MY STUDIES. I WANT TO BE THE BEST. I WANT TO BE IN A STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT. I WANT STRONG LINKS WITH INDUSTRY. I WANT TO STUDY BUSINESS LAW. I WANT TO PLAY THE LEADING ROLE. I WANT TO BE PART OF A COMMUNITY. I WANT TO RUN IN THE OLYMPICS. I WANT TO SHOW EVERYONE WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF. I WANT A GREAT EDUCATION. I WANT TO DO MY OWN THING. I WANT TO SURPRISE EVERYONE. I WANT TO BE CHALLENGED. I WANT TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD. I WANT TO BE ENCOURAGED. I WANT TO JOIN THE SCI-FI SOCIETY. I WANT TO BE IN A GREAT LOCATION. I WANT TO TRAVEL. I WANT MY OWN SPACE. I WANT SOMEONE TO TALK TO WHEN TIMES ARE HARD. I WANT TO BE TAUGHT BY EXPERTS. I WANT TO LIVE SOMEWHERE I CAN AFFORD. I WANT TO HAVE THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES. I WANT TO JOIN THE RUGBY CLUB. I WANT INTERNATIONAL STUDY. I WANT TO FIND MY OWN WAY. I WANT TO GET A GREAT JOB WHEN I GRADUATE. I WANT TO BE IN THE BEST PLACE TO LEARN. I WANT TO MEET NEW PEOPLE. I WANT TO EXPLORE LONDON. I WANT TIME TO THINK. I WANT TO HAVE A GREAT SOCIAL LIFE. I WANT TO BE CLOSE TO HOME. I WANT TO BE EMPLOYABLE. I WANT TO TRY SOMETHING NEW. I WANT TO COOK FOR MYSELF. I WANT TO SEE THE LATEST BANDS. I WANT APPROACHABLE LECTURERS. I WANT TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT MYSELF. I WANT TO GO TO THE BEST GALLERIES. I WANT A PLACE OF MY OWN. I WANT TO EXCEL. I WANT TO MAKE MORE OF MY TALENT. I WANT TO BE INVOLVED. I WANT TO WORK IN TV. I WANT AN ACTIVE STUDENT UNION. I WANT MY FAMILY TO BE PROUD OF ME. I WANT TO BE ON CAMPUS. I WANT TO DO SOMETHING THAT INTERESTS ME. I WANT TO GO TO THE GYM. I WANT TO CHOOSE FROM A DIVERSE RANGE OF COURSES. I WANT TO SHOP AT CAMDEN MARKET. I WANT TO FEEL SUPPORTED. I WANT TO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT CULTURES. I WANT TO ENJOY MYSELF. I WANT TO SUCCEED. I WANT TO USE THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY. I WANT TO SEE WHAT I CAN DO. I WANT TO BE PART OF SOMETHING SPECIAL. I WANT TO MIX WITH ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE. I WANT TO BE INSPIRED. I WANT ACCESS TO THE BEST FACILITIES. I WANT TO GO CLUBBING. I WANT REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE. I WANT TO CHANGE MY IMAGE. I WANT TO MAKE MY OWN DECISIONS. I WANT VALUE FOR MONEY. I WANT TO GO TO NEW PLACES. I WANT TO STRETCH MYSELF. I WANT TO SEE WEST END SHOWS. I WANT GOOD TRANSPORT LINKS. I WANT TO BE ME. I WANT RESPONSIBILITY. I WANT TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE. I WANT TO HAVE FUN WITH MY FRIENDS. I WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. I WANT TO REALISE MY POTENTIAL. I WANT TO DO RELEVANT WORK PLACEMENTS. I WANT TO STUDY COMPUTER GRAPHICS AND GAMES. I WANT TO DANCE. I WANT PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE. I WANT THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPLY FOR A SCHOLARSHIP. I WANT TO SEE THINGS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. I WANT TO VOICE MY OPINION. I WANT SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO. I WANT TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS. I WANT TO BE EMPLOYABLE. I WANT TO TAKE PART IN PIONEERING RESEARCH. I WANT BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP. I WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF MY TIME. I WANT TO SEE WHAT'S POSSIBLE.

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MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY, LONDON

WITH US, YOU CAN

Image from *A Suburban Occupation*, post on Owen Hatherley's blog; <http://nastybrutalistandshort.blogspot.com>

A Social Hieroglyphic?

Is it then perhaps also true that the “value of every product of labour” is transformed into “a *social hieroglyphic*”? [Tronti, 1962]

The above advert presents a matrix-like torrent of ‘wants’ or desires, all seemingly summed up in the main desire; to become more employable. Emerging from (or crushed against) this wall of desires is the outline of a prospective post-graduate student, who is simultaneously composed of and obscured by this flood. The figure, notes Hatherly, “is literally personified, facialised as a series of demands, alternately hedonistic and utilitarian, and always grimly conformist.” Two elements stick out; the first is the semi-visibility of the figure, the second, the subsumption of the many desires by the one main driving desire; to be employable. The figure, a potential student, and so a potential worker, is literally composed of the ‘wants’ that will determine their ‘employability’, something which, if seen from a work viewpoint, can be translated as labour-power, the capacity to do a certain form of work. From a social-factory perspective, so to see the university simply as another place of work, what confronts the viewer here is, fundamentally, a recruitment poster for the student-workforce, where the prospective student-worker is portrayed as consisting of the desires they should literally embody in order to eventually access wage labour, or to a certain extent the ‘middle-class’; “I want to be the best... I want to be me... I want responsibility... I want to be employable... I want business sponsorship... I want strong links with industry.” In a way, this poster provides a glimpse into what ‘employability’ precisely means in the social-factory sense; beyond the traditional requirements quoted above, one is also expected to “ride on the London Eye”, “join the sci-fi society”, “to live somewhere [one] can afford”, “to have a great social life”, “to have a place of [one’s] own”, “to use the latest technology”, “to dance”, “to have fun with friends.” In a sense it outlines the extent to which much of our general daily life has been made productive (in most of these cases via consumption), exemplifying and echoing how Tronti describes the entrance of production into “all relations of social life.” Perhaps also, in the same way Tronti describes the mechanism of the wage – as functionally hiding ‘the value of labour-power’ by positing the wage as ‘the value of labour’ – we can view the ghostly image of the prospective post-graduate student - both obscured and made visible by the matrix of ‘employability’ - as the figure of the worker, whose now socialised labour-power completely disappears within the attempt to *make them employable*. One key point to draw from this - in relation to Tronti’s discussion of how the wage, presented as ‘the value of

labour', functionally masks 'the value of labour-power' - is that 'employability' is another manifestation of the absence of labour-power, like 'human capital' it is a capitalist view of the worker's productive capacity. However even more than this, the work-relation itself becomes mystified, there is again the absence of labour e.g. in acquiring 'employability' in the future (in this case studying), one's *work* (productive, reproductive) in the present is made invisible. To go with the visual metaphor on the poster, and Tronti's initial remarks, "capital therefore *consumes* labour-power", or translated into the 'language of excellence'; employability *consumes* the worker, along with the very *appearance* of work. The image perfectly manifests a capitalist view of the worker, one which, in the same way Neo is able to perceive 'reality' as the code-form of the matrix, applies a filter whereby the reality of labour in production transforms into (productive) consumer desires, and the components of 'employability'. The labour-process is literally *consumed* by *consumption* within the valorization-process e.g. "I want to be me" as the labour of reproducing oneself, becomes "I want to be the *employable* me"³² – the labour aspect of which disappears as it is *consumed in the productive act of consumption*. This poster's pictorial representation of the worker is almost an exact inversion of Tronti's own proposal; "as a matter of urgency we must get hold of, and start circulating, a photograph of the worker-proletariat that shows him as he really is – "proud and menacing"" [Tronti, 1980]³³ (Perhaps instead of as 'happily hidden').

Hatherly's essay also investigates the various (sub)urban spaces occupied by Middlesex University itself, which he states, has "an effect of maximum decentralisation - not only in North London, but far elsewhere - Mauritius and Dubai each have a branch of the University, both of which are no doubt more important than the Philosophy department." Importantly the issue of university "partnerships" with property developers is brought up (or Private Finance Initiatives – PFI), specifically concerning the privatization and takeover of the University's 'student accomodation' by 'Servite homes' - a charity, and Registered Social Landlord, that Hatherly bitingly describes as being "just one letter away from accuracy."³⁴ He goes on to state that "Halls of Residence continue to be the most consistently awful buildings in the country, viciously banal hutches provided for what developers assume to be a captive, ill-

³² Or perhaps in the logic of the Philosophy department's defenders; "I want to be the *employable* philosopher".

³³ Rosa Luxemburg begins her *Sozialreform oder Revolution?* (Three Arrows Press, 1937) positing a perhaps similar pictorial inversion; "If it is true that theories are only the images of the phenomena of the exterior world in human consciousness, it must be added, concerning Bernstein's system, that theories are sometimes inverted images."

³⁴ The fact that 'servite', as well as 'servile', have their root in the latin *servus*; meaning servant, serf, or slave, opens the question of whether this company's name is the result of bad taste or is some form of extreme corporate transparency.

informed and easily exploited market.” Highlighting the “totally dispersed, totally atomised” nature of both the university and its population, he also notes that Middlesex has “no particular Traditions of Glorious Rebellion.” Something which is refuted in the comments section by pointing out the fact that the “fine art provision has its roots in its adoption of Hornsey School of Art, which saw much political action in the 60s... What’s also interesting though, is why this continuity feels concealed.” The reason for examining this here is that it points to the aforementioned process of *dispersion*. On the one hand this University, that is called a factory, already and solely on an urban level, exists in a diffuse, atomized manner;

If this particular University *is* a factory, like the factory it has learnt one of the principal lessons of the 20th century - if you want to avoid conflict, decentralise, get out as far away from the (imagined) centres of power as possible, disappear from public view, and make the question of who actually holds power as opaque as possible. [Hatherly, 2010]

On the other hand, the University’s various histories have been through a similar process, dispersed, and so concealed, to the extent that, as one of the comments mentions, professors involved in the 1968 protest action “were excited to hear what was going on in philosophy, yet unwilling to join in themselves... not prepared to re-enact or revisit it again.” Hatherly sums up the disagreement stating; “Middlesex *presents* itself, and to a large extent is experienced as, a diffuse, dispersed university with no particular history.”

During the campaign, this historical and urban dispersion, its noted, was overcome with various solidarity actions held at other sites. Perhaps in that sense the unifying factor of an identity such as ‘factory’ plays an important role (although not to overstate the ‘factory’ as an identity, and especially not to skip over the amount of work that goes into creating solidary networks). In overcoming this dispersion within the broader social relations of production, the political subject is a crucial and tricky matter; how to avoid the over-generalisation of a term such as ‘multitude’ whilst maintaining a certain specificity; on the one side it entails an experimental approach to the creation of subjectivities (perhaps along the lines of the ‘Metropolitan Indians’ or more recently the ‘Anomalous Wave’ in Italy), on the other recognising the socialized conditions of production (without falling into the traps of cultural, epistemic, or immaterial abstraction).

To bring this back to the two main phenomena presented above, the protest letter and the advertising poster, there are two perspectives of the development of a single university. One

that can be described as capitalist (the viewpoint of the university administration + PR) and the other as labour (viewpoint of a large group of waged academics). One is being made ‘poor’, one is posing the question of how to become richer. Philosophy, it seems, wants to be ‘excellent’, ‘prestigious’, ‘wealthy’, it doesn’t want to end up like the powerless student who can only ask for better employability, i.e. better wages. If we place these examples within the framework of the labour and valorization-process, one presents a defence against impoverishment, the other the desire for wealth, so both fall into the valorization category, both look at the production process from a value-perspective, (‘don’t de-value this’ and ‘how to up your value’) and importantly both fail to notice, or consciously dismantle/ignore, the labour-process and labour-power. They both see capital, where there is in fact labour, and both see employability subsuming the worker. In taking that perspective they also importantly lose the agency that would, at least according to Tronti, come from recognising the political potential of labour-power. The nature of this agency will be discussed in more detail below.

Society and the State

As part of Tronti’s depiction of the merger between society and factory, he also addresses the relation between “society and state”. He posits that, as the “factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society”; “the machinery of the political state tends to increasingly identify with the figure of the *collective capitalist*, increasingly becoming the property of capitalist production modes and therefore a *function of capitalists*.” [Tronti, 1962]

This is of course a vast topic, and the question of ‘the political’ seems to have become one of Tronti’s main preoccupations in his later work,³⁵ so here are specific notes on the state within the social-factory. Two characters are outlined by Tronti; the ‘political state’, and the ‘collective capitalist’. The political state in this formulation is the one that functions *other than* solely for capital. The collective capitalist, one assumes, is the manifestation (or perhaps manifestations) of capital as a class.³⁶ Bypassing the question of whether the welfare state

³⁵ See for instance, *La politica al tramonto*, Einaudi, Turin, 1998, (french translation; http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/tronti/politique_au_crepuscule.html) especially the chapter ‘Karl und Carl’, a study of the two ‘Carls’, Marx and Schmidt. Also see the short lecture by Tronti *Workerism and Politics*, published in *Historical Materialism*, vol. III, issue 18 (2010) pp.186–189.

³⁶ What is a collective capitalist exactly? What examples are there for understanding this? To pose a rough conception of this term, it could be understood either in terms of ‘global capitalism’, so a hegemonic capitalist system, currently dominated by the US, that has global reach, or it could designate a variety of capitalist power centres, that share the same core values but also come into conflict while pursuing them. In the US (which still

is/was fully capitalist or not (it could simply be described as functioning for capital but also paying some attention to the labour-process and the reproduction of labour), the present crisis seems to present a double move on the part of the 'state'; firstly key state services are cut (and, for example, as previously mentioned reproductive work is increasingly unpaid and intensified); secondly the repressive role of the state is steadily increased, both in terms of increasing 'security', surveillance etc. as well as, in many cases, through war.³⁷ These processes of course vary between different nations, but to continue with the logic of a social-factory inquiry, and along the lines of Tronti's description; if state apparatuses are viewed solely in terms of their relation to expanded global production (also specifically within the labour and valorization processes) its easier to see, for instance, the near homogeneity of the transnational university reform process, or the wave of 'austerity', or proletarianisation, that is simultaneously active in many parts of the world (although of course at different intensities). One of the main reasons for applying this perspective is to question the general tendency for current protest movements to almost solely address their demands and concerns to national governments, or to their institutions. National governments are of course very powerful institutions, but seen from a social-factory perspective (or indeed from any perspective) its fairly clear that this power, is a power of capital, and manifests itself increasingly against the interests of the majority of workers. This is not to argue against directing protests at the state, but to view the state in a diffuse way, to view it as simply another key institution within the framework of capital and its increasingly socialized production. This seems important to

has some 200+ of the most powerful companies in the world) there are a proliferation of inter-corporation assemblies and organisations. David Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* [Oxford University Press, 2005] talks of a "disparate group of individuals embedded in the corporate, financial, trading, and developer worlds [who] do not necessarily conspire as a class, and while there may be frequent tensions between them, they nevertheless possess a certain accordance of interests that generally recognizes the advantages (and now some of the dangers) to be derived from neoliberalization. They also possess, through organizations like the World Economic Forum at Davos, means of exchanging ideas and of consorting and consulting with political leaders. They exercise immense influence over global affairs and possess a freedom of action that no ordinary citizen possesses." Brian Holmes also made a similar point recently; "My observation is that the simultaneity of public service cuts and particularly, the attack on the universities throughout what used to be called the "western" world, very likely reflects an elite consensus on the ways that governments should address the crisis. It's pretty astonishing how similar the response has been in every country, to the point where I am not aware of an exception (please enlighten me, someone). Judging from how this has gone down historically, such a consensus was probably forged in the usual places: the meetings of the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, the endlessly tentacular American Chamber of Commerce, the European Roundtable of Industrialists with its permanent lobbying of the European Commission, etc."

<http://www.thenextlayer.org/node/1347>. Leslie Sklair of the London School of Economics has identified the 'Transnational Capitalist Class' (TCC) as "comprising four fractions: those who own and control the major corporations and their local affiliates, globalizing bureaucrats and politicians, globalizing professionals, and consumerist elites." (*Democracy and the Transnational Capitalist Class*, 2002, <http://www.uni-muenster.de/PeaCon/global-texte/r-m/144sklair.pdf>)

³⁷ Although interestingly, austerity measures in the UK have also affected the military, and the police force faces some of the biggest cuts in the public sector, and is now discussing the historical rarity of a potential police strike (which hasn't occurred since a one-day strike in 1919, leading to its currently illegal status). An experiment perhaps in anarcho-capitalism. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/mar/08/police-protests-pay-cuts>

apply to current social struggles as it firstly helps understand why national governments are powerless to meet the demands of protests (as well as why the state continues in the other direction, privatizing public services etc.), and secondly necessitates the development of a transnational (perhaps meta-national) response to what is already a transnational process, as well as a return to ideas of an 'international working-class', albeit with an expanded notion of work.

One of the major perceptions of the state that often seems to emerge is that it should pursue a 'positive' economic path, which seems to be abandoned during crisis periods for questionable 'uneconomic' behaviour; one of the most popular defences against cutting university budgets, for instance, being that cuts to education will lead to financial loss in the future. Said differently, cutting investment in social reproduction, will of course, cut the production of surplus value *in the long term* (and so the production of capital). In this sense, while there is most definitely a quite highly developed 'state', the question is whether the state maintains any agenda other than the agenda of capital, is the state today able to make decisions outside of capital (a 'political state'), or is it as Tronti suggests, simply a *function of capitalists*? To posit this today amongst the proliferation of what Rosa Luxemburg might refer to as 'the anarchy of capital' (understood as the absence of a 'political state') the question seems to have an obvious answer. From the 'swing-door' system of most national governments, by which politicians oscillate between corporation and state - to the recent 'cash for amendments' scandal involving Austrian and Spanish MEP's - to the revelations of 'economic hitman', John Perkins, about what he labels 'the corporatocracy'; that is "not a conspiracy" but a "fairly small group of, mostly men, who run our biggest corporations and through them they run [the US] government and practically every other important government in the world."³⁸ Rosa Luxemburg's approach is useful because it envelops a whole range of, apparently contradictory processes (e.g. the many examples of 'uneconomic' behaviour). It is a way of understanding the contradictions that lead a capitalist economy to function against its own interests, but also because of them.³⁹ In her *Social Reform or Revolution?*, Luxemburg,

³⁸ John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, 2006, Ebury Press. See also extract of speech given at the Veterans for Peace National Convention:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqsWti3mL8k&feature=player_embedded#at=49

³⁹ See also John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, *Capital Crisis and the State*, published in *Capital & Class* Summer 1977 vol. 1 no. 2 76-101, <http://cnc.sagepub.com/content/1/2/76.full.pdf+html>;

"Even if capital could "organise" itself through the state, the basic contradiction of capital accumulation would remain - the fact that **the pursuit of surplus value implies the tendential destruction or elimination of the basis of surplus value production – the productive worker**. Far from solving capital's problems, the growth of state expenditure diverts an increasing amount of surplus value away from the centres of accumulation, making it unavailable for the direct exploitation of more labour-power..." "The increased intervention of the state in the

in a similar manner, and even circumstances, to Tronti,⁴⁰ maps out why state intervention, or the social reform of capitalism alone, isn't enough to overcome a capitalist economy's inner contradictions. She identifies the three outcomes of capitalist development as; "the growing anarchy of capitalist economy"; "the progressive socialization of the process of production"; and the "increased organization and consciousness of the proletarian class." Her argument directs itself against fellow Social Democratic Party (SPD) member Eduard Bernstein, who argued that capitalism can be moderated and its crises avoided via 'means of adaptation' such as credit and employers' organizations, a perspective which of course has become predominant in most 'social democratic' political parties (to the point that the UK Labour Party under Tony Blair could happily conclude the process of neoliberalization started by Margaret Thatcher). Luxemburg takes Bernstein's arguments to pieces, and precisely shows that these means of adaptation are in fact only means for increasing the inner contradictions of a capitalist economy. She also attacks the perception of the state, as promoted by Bernstein and Konrad Schmidt;

Once he has thus happily transformed the state into society, he confidently adds: "That is to say, the rising working-class." [...] The mystification is obvious. We know that the present state is not "society" representing the "rising working-class." It is itself the representative of capitalist society. It is a class state. Therefore its reform measures are not an application of "social control," that is, the control of society working freely in its own labour process. They are forms of control applied by the class organization of Capital to the production of Capital. The so-called social reforms are enacted in the interests of capital. [Luxemburg, 1899]

The prescience of Luxemburg's analyses today is revealing; as the neoliberal project continues, or perhaps more precisely as the power of the 'capitalist class' is further (re)consolidated, in the face of the largest credit crisis in history and in the midst of what seems to be the final struggles of the remnants of the welfare/social-democratic state, her indictment of social-democratic revisionism, or its failure to recognise its own revolutionary

reproduction of capital necessarily creates closer ties between capitals and the state, thus providing the material basis for theories of state monopoly capitalism. However, in so far as they assume that this makes capitalism more organised, more capable of being planned, such theories clearly overlook the fact that **the development of closer ties between capital and state does not replace capitalist anarchy, it merely ensures that capitalist anarchy is increasingly reproduced within the state apparatus itself.** One consequence of this is that even within the bounds set by surplus value production, it cannot be assumed that the state will act rationally in the interests of capital in general. On the contrary, the reproduction of competition within the state apparatus ensures an inevitable dislocation, an inevitable tension between state' activity and the interests of capital in general – an inevitable arbitrariness and imbalance in the way that the state ensures the reproduction of capital." p.95

⁴⁰ Both were aiming to rid their respective parties of dogmatic Marxist doctrines, by employing a close analysis of the original writings and arguments.

aims, seems necessary to repeat; “We move here in a straight line toward the total abandonment of the class viewpoint.”⁴¹ [Ibid]

In Tronti’s depiction too we find what is probably a similar perspective of the revisionism of his own Italian Communist Party’s role in the state (anticipating perhaps the later ‘historic compromise’ between the PCI and the Christian Democrats);

The process of the unitary composition of capitalist society, a result of the specific development of its production, will **no longer tolerate the existence of a political sphere**, even only formally independent of the network of social relations. In a certain sense it is true that **the political functions of the state** are already **being increasingly drawn into society**, with the small difference that it’s here a matter of **the class society of capitalist production**: one calmly takes all of this as a *sectarian* reaction to all those who see, in the modern political state, the neutral ground of confrontation between capital and labour. [Tronti, 1962]

Perhaps the question, largely unaddressed within this paper so far, is exactly what the social/society, of the ‘social-factory’ actually refers to. To retrace the process according to Tronti, society and factory increasingly merge, as does society and state; in the above quotation Tronti identifies the ‘class society of capitalist production’ into which the political functions of the state are increasingly drawn, within this ‘class society’ then, one is not confronted with an organic and homogenous entity, but an increasingly conflictual process. The ground of confrontation shifts, not a struggle between labour and capital over the political state, but “the frontal clash between the *factory, as working-class* and *society, as capital*” [Tronti, 1980]. In the dissolution of the clear lines between these elements; factory, state and society – society becomes capital; the factory becomes (or has the potential to become) the working-class.

Social $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ Factory

The ‘social-factory’ as a concept then either mistakenly posits an organic entity, or it can be seen as the total unit within which the struggle between the ‘social’ and the ‘factory’ takes place. In the latter, it is then in essence the construction of a particular class viewpoint.

⁴¹ The aim of this paper is very much to try and rediscover this ‘class viewpoint’ within the complexities of contemporary society.

When the **developments of capital's interests in the factory are blocked**, then **the functioning of society seizes up**: the way is then open for overthrowing and destroying the very basis of capital's power. Those, however, who have the contrary perspective, of taking over the running of the "general interests of society", are committing the error of reducing the factory to capital by means of reducing the working-class, that is, a part of society, to society as a whole." [Tronti, 1980]

As mentioned, Tronti never refers to a 'social-factory'; he mentions the "capitalist factory" and more recently the "great factory". The point seems to be, as in the above quotation, to recognise the *component, partial* nature, and existence of, the political working-class, so in fact the idea of a *society-wide* factory is wrong, at least to the extent that working-class is identified with the factory, the expanded ("great", "capitalist") factory is that which produces society, it is the factory *of* society, in the sense that society (capital) is the product, as well as that which controls and envelops the expanded factory (working-class).

If the factory appoints itself as master over the whole of society – the whole of social production becomes industrial production – then the particular features of the factory are lost within the general features of society. If the entire society is reduced to the factory, then the factory as such seems to *disappear*. It is upon this material basis, at a much more advanced level, that the uppermost ideological expansion of the bourgeois metamorphosis repeats and concludes. The highest degree of the development of capitalist production marks the deepest mystification of all bourgeois social relations. The growing real process of *proletarianisation* appears formally as a process of *Tertiarisation*. The reduction of every form of work to industrial work, **every type of work to the commodity labour-power**, appears as the destruction of labour-power as commodity, therefore as cancellation of its value as a product. The payment of any price for labour in the form of the wage appears as the absolute elimination of the surplus labour of the worker. [Tronti, 1962]

It doesn't seem then to be a case of differentiating between two types of factory, one fordist (factory) and one post-fordist (social-factory), but to recognise that 'factory' now necessarily designates the political working-class; or as Tronti states in a more recent essay on the 2008 financial meltdown, *Politics at Work*; "either the workers constitute a political force or they do not exist." So, as above, it *cannot* be a matter of stating that the factory *is* society, or that society has completely subsumed the factory, they cannot be reduced to one another without positing the disappearance of the factory, both of these cases imply a return to the non-existence of workers, perhaps it is also within that, that the recognition of a general process of proletarianisation is important - not a simple workforce growth in the tertiary/service sector, not even stable as opposed to precarious work, but the increasing clarity of exploitation as a shared condition.

The famous transformations of work are like the equally famous transformations of capitalism: when everything has been said, nothing has changed. The storytellers of the social come and describe the state of affairs: the liquid instead of the solid, what melts into air rather than what sediments on the ground, the whole that must become flexible, the production that becomes molecular, the power that is everywhere and nowhere like the holy spirit, because it is micro and no longer macro, and then the immaterial, the cognitive, the politics that is bios, made to measure for the asocial individual – forget about women and men of flesh and bone who organise themselves for the struggle. With limitless patience we read and listen, careful not to let what we don't know slip through our fingers. What is to be done about the exploitation of work? Do we put up with it, hiding it like dust under the carpet of good manners, or do we start once again to condemn it, showing that it is what objectively and materially unifies the current form of fragmented labour? [Tronti, 2008]

The social-factory then is perhaps best understood along the lines of the labour and valorization process, that the 'social', and the 'factory' must be seen "separately, but as a unit, until the point at which they confront each other as contradictions, when they mutually exclude each other"; the point at which the 'factory' becomes the site or "material lever for the dissolution of capital, the one placed at the decisive point of the system." The key question then is how, within this fairly complex social-factory conception, are exploitation, and the power of capital to be challenged? In *Politics at Work*, Tronti suggests to begin answering this question by "bringing the theme of work back on the political agenda. How? With whom? The answer to the last question seems obvious: with the workers themselves. Getting to know them again, these unknowns. Getting them to speak again, these mutes. Bringing the place of work back into the non-places of today's politics." Perhaps this also entails returning to the relation between 'workers and capital', and the simple fact that one produces the other.

The Struggle Against Labour

A corpse rules society – the corpse of labour. [Krisis-Group, Manifesto Against Labour, 1999]

The struggle against work sums up the meaning of the workerist heresy. [Tronti, 2010]

The apocalypse...is capital's threat - if we go too far - to take us all down with it. If we annoy God too much, if we agitate too much, if we become too unavailable for work, then the "mutual destruction of classes" is used as a club to bring us back into line. But must the molecule fear if the engine dies? The true cause of capital's crisis in the last decade is work, or more precisely, the struggle against it... The proper name for

the crisis then is the “work crisis” or, better, the “work/energy” crisis. [Midnight Notes Collective, 1980]

One of the oft-used, and perhaps under-analyzed terms within this paper so far is that of the ‘working-class’. It’s a term that elicits a multitude of interpretations, and also one that sounds fairly outdated, who or what exactly is the working-class today? If it is the politicized form of labour-power, then where is this labour-power manifest, or where is it hidden? Who is involved in the labour process, and who in valorization? Are we talking about a schizophrenic working-class fighting against itself, against its projected existence as ‘capital’? Or is it possible to return to archaic categories of owners of means of production on one side, and owners of labour-power on the other? Perhaps in a sense, it is a question of firstly (re-) recognizing labour-power, and then - not simply welcoming back the long-lost ‘working-class’ - but fundamentally rethinking what the political form of labour-power is or could be today; especially in terms of creating transnational political subjectivities. Tronti himself addressed this uncertainty in a 2006 lecture, *Workerism and Politics*; “Does the working-class still exist? The working-class as the central subject of the critique of capitalism. Not a sociological object but a political subject. And the transformations of work, and of the figure of the worker, from industry to service, from employment [*lavoro dipendente*] to self-employment [*lavoro autonomo*], from security to precarity, from the refusal of work to the lack of it, what does all this mean politically?” [Tronti, 2010] To answer these questions then, perhaps we begin again with the centrality of labour-power, in order to try and “pick up the legacy of the great history of the workers’ movement” [Ibid.].

Within the concept of the social-factory as the encapsulation of a conflictual struggle between ‘society’ and ‘factory’, what role is played by labour-power? Labour-power is that which is used up (*verwertet*) and then (ideally) also reproduced within the socialized relations of production, so in the latter case it is situated within the “great factory”; and in the former, in its role as the producer of surplus value and the *provider* of capital, it is also the basis for the *society as capital*. “Thus the *society of capital* and the *workers’ party* find themselves existing as two opposite forms with **one and the same content**” [Tronti, 1980]. Labour-power has then a dual role, it is simultaneously the basis of both capital, and the political working-class, however it can exist as the political working-class only inasmuch as it utilizes the fact that it is also the basis of capital. It is for this reason that Tronti identifies the capitalist fear of

working-class organization, “hence the necessity of exploitation”⁴² [Ibid.] and the increasing domination and socialization of the relations of work.

Capital attacks labour on its own terrain; only from within work can it succeed in disintegrating the total worker, and then to integrate the isolated worker. No longer simply the means of production on the one side, and the worker on the other; but on one side the totality of the relations of work, on the other the worker, who works: labour and labour-power are opposed to one another, but both find themselves *inside* capital together. [Tronti, 1962]

The centrality of labour-power posits a shift on the part of capital, its no longer simply a matter of owning the means of production, but of increasingly dominating the relations of work, of controlling and disintegrating labour-power’s existence as the political working-class. The outcome then of working-class struggle is that the totality of the relations of work stand opposite the worker who works; in this way ‘labour’, as that which is dominated and provided by capital, becomes opposed to labour-power. It is then no longer simply a case of workers taking over the means of production, but of struggling against or refusing ‘work’ itself. The relation between labour and labour-power is the microcosm of the relation between ‘society of capital’ and ‘working-class factory’. Although it isn’t a clear struggle between two separate power blocs, as the ‘factory as working-class’ is within ‘society as capital’. Labour-power is that which is hidden within (the value of) labour, *because* it is the substance of capital itself, labour and labour-power are both inside capital together.

No worker today is disposed to recognize the existence of labour outside capital. Labour equals exploitation. [...] Workers have no time for the dignity of labour. The “pride of the producer” they leave entirely to the boss. [...] Today the working-class need only to look at itself to understand capital. It need only combat itself in order to destroy capital. It has to recognize itself as a political power, deny itself as a productive force. [...] The working class confronts its own labour as capital, as a hostile force, as an enemy – this is the point of departure not only for the antagonism, but for the organization of the antagonism. [Tronti, 1972]

This strategy of refusal, or struggle against labour it seems is not a prescription for some imagined future society, but it is posited as the basis for creating something other than capitalism, based on the power of workers. In *Politics at Work* Tronti calls for a political re-

⁴² “Capitalists are afraid of the history of workers, not of the politics of the Left. The first they cast down among the demons of hell, the second they welcomed into the halls of government.” [Tronti, 2010]

“Exploitation is born, historically, from the necessity for capital to escape from its de facto subordination to the class of worker-producers. [...] It is the directly political thrust of the working-class that necessitates economic development on the part of capital, which, starting from the point of production, reaches out to the whole of social relations.” [Tronti, 1980]

interpretation of work that is “serious, lucid, realistic, non-ideological, non-conventional, non-electoralist. [...] It will not suffice to cloister oneself in a generous heretical sect of the refounders of communism in order to resolve this problem.” To begin then with labour-power is to open up a variety of questions, and possible alternatives to the present crises of capitalism, not to return to outmoded dogmatisms or ideologies, but to return to a conception of labour-power that emerged as the political working-class, and that “took off the uniform of the producer of surplus value and donned the outfit of the realiser of political value, [which] threatened ... the constituted order, hinting at something other and beyond.” [Tronti, 2008]

The nature of this confrontation as a “frontal clash” is, in a certain sense, difficult to understand, even along the lines Tronti lays out. It seems far more to be caught up in cyclical processes; factory produces society, society dominates the factory, labour-power produces surplus value, surplus value becomes fixed capital which dominates living labour, and so on. Perhaps this is an oversimplification, but if its possible to envisage the political working-class fully conscious of the fact that it produces the conditions of capital, it simply becomes a question of how to use the “material lever” and switch off the assembly line, without of course destroying oneself, or ones environment in the process.⁴³ To put it naively, how to refuse work and the production of capital, and still recognise the necessary labour required to live? One of the images that Tronti refers to, which perhaps relates better to this cyclical perspective than to a “frontal clash”, is of a “confrontation between what Marx referred to in analogy as “the huge children’s shoes of the proletariat and the dwarfish size of the worn-out political shoes of the bourgeoisie”” [Tronti, 1980]. Within this analogy it seems to be almost as simple as changing a pair of shoes, a question of recognising a certain power that somehow unknowingly exists.

The constitution within the factory will sanction "the exclusive domination of the factory" over the whole of society. Indeed that would also generalize the direct struggle against this domination. And in fact it is at this point not only *possible*, but it is historically *necessary* to embed the general struggle against the social system in the social relations of production, to overthrow the bourgeois society within capitalist production in crisis. [Tronti, 1962]⁴⁴

⁴³ Stewart Martin talks about the struggle to “wrest non-capitalist life from capitalist life” (in *The Pedagogy of Human Capital*, 2008, Mute Magazine, <http://www.metamute.org/en/Pedagogy-of-Human-Capital>) and Silvia Federici calls for a struggle “against reproductive labour that would not destroy ourselves or our communities” (in *Precarious Labour: A Feminist Viewpoint*, 2006, <http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarius-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/>)

⁴⁴ The *Communiqué from an Absent Future* also seems to echo the above quotation from Tronti when it states; “If cynicism is simply the inverted form of enthusiasm, then beneath every frustrated leftist academic is a latent radical. The shoulder shrug, the dulled face, the squirm of embarrassment when discussing the fact that the US

More specifically here, the struggle against labour, to the extent that the *capitalist* factory has spread over the whole of society, becomes an embedding of the struggle against the “social system” within the social relations of production, an opening up of the struggle in terms of a dispersed site of work (the social system), as well as a more varied figure of the worker. On the last point its not clear if Tronti himself would agree. Despite the sizeable body of work relating to the role of unpaid labour as integral to the social relations of production, and the fact that *Factory and Society* seems to point in the same direction, even perhaps grounding some of the later Feminist-Marxist writings, in 2008, Tronti still seems to exclude the unpaid worker from his depiction of the “social figure of the exploited”;

Is it not true that today the social figure of the exploited brings together **the worker in the great factory**, the employee of the small service company, the precarious call-centre worker, the college graduate baby-sitter, the teacher or professor commuting while she awaits a permanent post, the labourer risking his life in one of many thousands of subcontracted firms, the immigrant construction worker, the part-time researcher technician and the scandalously underpaid, or even not paid, contract lecturer, all the way to the self-employed worker filing his tax returns who, compared to the rest, has the privilege of exploiting himself? Asking what worker means after the working-class is the same thing as wondering what the left is after the workers’ movement. This is well and truly an epochal problem. [Tronti, 2008]

He mentions the “worker in the great factory”, but all the others are in some kind of wage-relation, a relation that of course serves to hide the value of labour-power. Additionally, it seems that the precise question one should be asking is what ‘worker’ means today, of repeating the question on the floor of the “great factory”, and learning to see the forms and extent to which exploitation functions, and is part of everyday life.

Another issue here is the oft-repeated question of the inside and outside of capitalism. After hearing a multitude of discussions on ‘how to get outside of capitalism’, or ones that ended with the sombre, defeated notion that capitalism has no outside, Tronti seems to reverse the question, not what is capitalism’s outside, but does capital actually have any content? What are its insides? How does it survive? This reversal of the question is what places labour-power

murdered a million Iraqis between 2003 and 2006, that every last dime squeezed from America’s poorest citizens is fed to the banking industry, that the seas will rise, billions will die and there’s nothing we can do about it—this discomfited posture comes from feeling oneself pulled **between the is and the ought of current left thought**. One feels that there is no alternative, and yet, on the other hand, that another world is possible. We will not be so petulant. The synthesis of these positions is right in front of us: **another world is not possible; it is necessary**. The collapse of the global economy is here and now.” [Research and Destroy, 2009]

at the centre of both factory and society. However, despite this centrality of labour-power within the capitalist system, to describe capitalism today in terms of a fixed inside/outside relation, seems fairly inaccurate. From what Tronti sketches out, the image that emerges is of a constantly shifting process, the production cycle that transforms labour-power - into surplus value - into capital - into dead labour - back into the tools of living labour. The inside and outside of that process are constantly in motion, if they exist at all, so perhaps it's necessary to dispense with this notion of a fixed space of the externality/internality of the capital-labour relation, perhaps in a similar manner to the *dispersion* mentioned previously. The fixed sites of production have been transformed - even what could be considered as traditional factories, today function as nodes on production lines that literally begin in peoples homes⁴⁵ and face a mostly precarious and temporary existence, subject to the changing whims of corporations and their increasingly zonal approach to production. This dispersion is also perhaps somewhat contradictorily present within free-trade and export processing zones, as the mega-factories, or "assembly-islands" of the present, within the "great automated factory" [Tronti, 2010]. They also perhaps posit a more specific understanding of changes to fordism, not simply post-fordism as in that which comes after, but specifically the factory's massification and intensification; perhaps 'hyper-fordism' is a more suitable generalization. To understand these zones fixedly in terms of inside/outside doesn't seem sufficient, they are on the one hand perhaps the most totalizing 'factories' ever made, and on the other are part of cyclical processes that connect with multitudes of other zones within flows of global 'social relations of production' that begin and end with human bodies, and are manifested in repetitive strains, burn-out, or for those lucky enough to access medication, the numbness of being able to 'kill' the pain. To sidestep the intricacies of zonal production, perhaps it is enough for the moment to critically question the strategic use of the inside/outside analogy, and look for other ways of interpreting possible forms of agency within global production processes that flow between workers and capital.

⁴⁵ See the film *Many Straws Make a Nest, Proletarian Unrest in Dehli's Industrial Belt*, 2010, by KanalB [<http://kanalb.org/>] in close cooperation with [Gurgaon Workers News](#) & [Faridabad Majdoor Samachar](#), (also with the Hindi workers' newspaper project associated with the Kamunist Kranti group). The film shows "whole families creating parts for industry" (e.g. Maruti Suzuki) in their homes and deals with the recent struggles of precarious migrant workers from rural areas in the export-processing zones of Faridabad and Gurgaon, "one of the world's major industrial hubs ... 4.5 million industrial workers in Southern Dehli are willing to ruin their health for wages their families can hardly survive on" (from the film blurb).

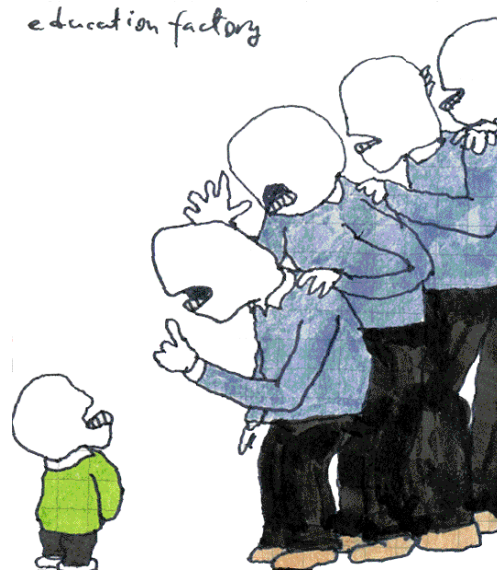
Ambivalence of Labour

When all one's energy is required to stay afloat, there's hardly anything left to invent the future. [Marker, 2084]

The error of the old maximalism [maximum programme] consisted in that it comprehended this polarity, so to speak, from the outside, it saw the working-class **entirely outside of capital** and so generally as its antagonists; hence the inability of any scientific understanding and the sterility of every practical struggle. Instead, it must be said that, from the standpoint of the worker, one is not directly permitted to observe the conditions of the worker, but **one must look directly at the circumstances of capital**. Also in their own analyses, workers must grant capital a privileged place, namely, the same privilege that capital objectively possesses within the system. As if that wasn't enough the working-class must conceive of itself as a **material component of capital**, if it wants to position itself as a whole against capital. It must recognize itself as a particular feature of capital, if later it wants to emerge as its general antagonist. The total worker is positioned not only against the machine, insofar as it is constant capital, but **against labour-power itself**, insofar as it is variable capital. It must come to have capital in its entirety as the enemy, and therefore also itself, insofar as it is part of capital. **Labour must view labour-power, insofar as it is a commodity, as its own enemy.** [Tronti, 1962]

In *Factory and Society* there's a certain split, a schizophrenia of work, or perhaps an ambivalence of labour, one that lingers in every workplace, and at every site within the social relations of production. As noted, from the standpoint of the worker there are, within the process of work, two opposing elements, the conditions of work, and the labour-power that is valorized in the process, on the one side is that which belongs to capital (the conditions of work), on the other that which belongs to the worker (labour-power). "The worker cannot be *labour* other than in relation to the capitalist. The capitalist cannot be *capital* other than in relation to the worker" [Tronti, 1980]. The first ambivalence of labour then lies in this entanglement, in the unity of the labour and valorization process, that whilst working (also in the expanded sense) one is caught between labour and labour-power. Let's call this 'ambivalence 1', labour (capital) vs labour-power (worker). However to further complicate the matter (or possibly to simplify it) this double-sided nature of work is itself based on the dual nature of labour-power; labour-power as commodity and labour-power as potential political working-class. The "total worker" or labour as a class is against itself as commodity. Labour-power then becomes both potential for liberation from work, as well as that which is to be viewed as enemy in order to achieve that liberation. This will be provisionally titled 'ambivalence 2', labour-power (as total worker) vs labour-power (as commodity).

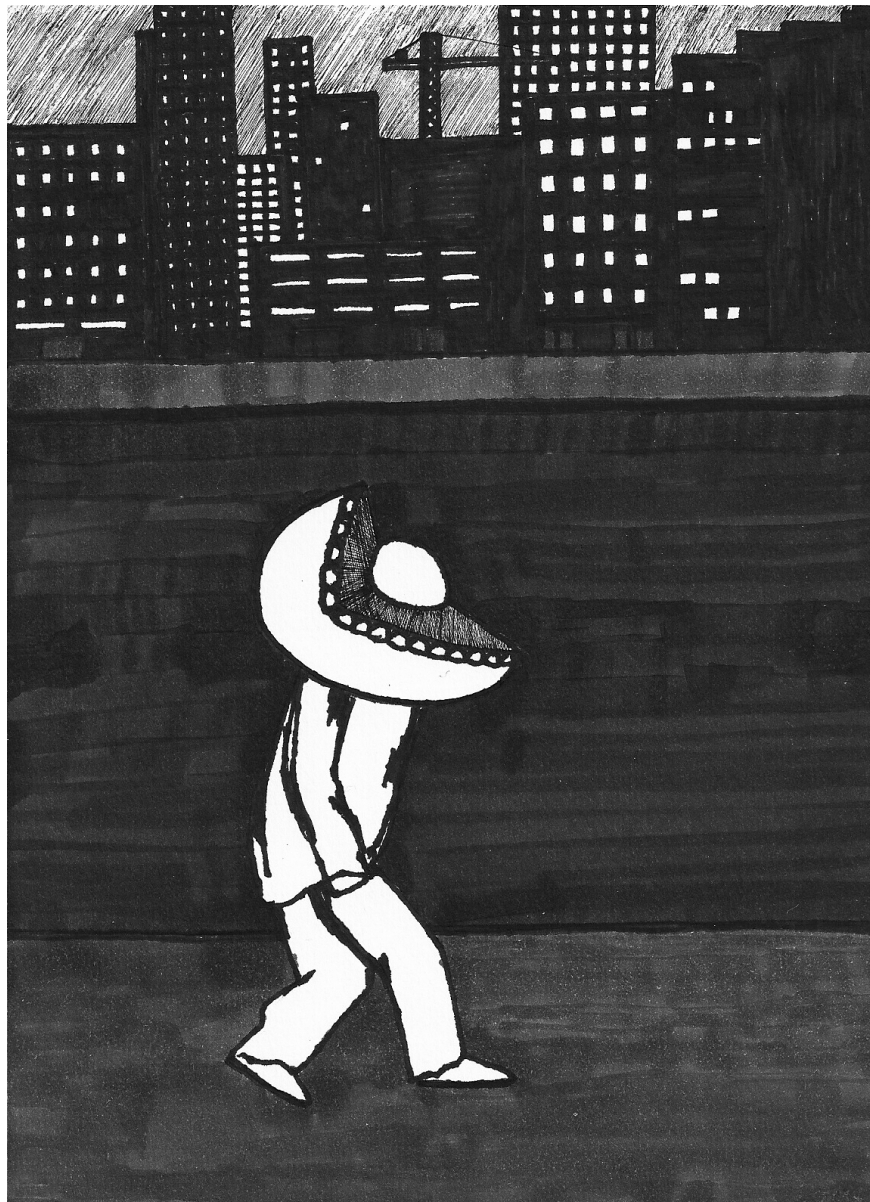
In 2007 I asked David Kellner, to draw an 'education factory':



Whilst wishing to maintain a certain wariness towards visualizing complex realities/ideas, perhaps the above drawing is useful in understanding this labour(-power) ambiguity. On first glance it can be interpreted in the sense that a child (small figure in green) is being commanded by its educational work-masters, the ambiguity of the drawing however means that the child figure could equally be a (somewhat small) factory manager, barking out commands to its somewhat disoriented, uniformed workers. Both of these readings then exemplify ambivalence 1; the manager or teacher (part of the conditions of work, and therefore capital) commands the (student-)worker/s as part of the valorization of their labour-power, so exemplifies labour vs labour-power, capital vs worker. If we view this drawing though, after Tronti, “separately, but as a unit” it also illustrates ambivalence 2. Depending on how one views the drawing determines who is manager and who is managed, so in a way the ambiguity of the drawing allows for the fluid perception of e.g. the small character, as at one moment manager, in the next, managed. In a sense then the drawing perfectly portrays the position of the student/edu-worker within the edu-factory, on the one hand they exist as commodities themselves, to be moulded within the process of producing educated workers, on the other hand - either to the extent that the particular edu-factory has been integrated into the

valorization process [privatized or for-profit school or university] or in the more general sense that education plays an indirect role in commodity production - they exist as producer (this is of course ignoring the extent to which wage labour outside of the institution could also be considered as part of the edu-factory, understood in the dispersed sense). The figure is then both producer as well as produced, manager and managed, depending on one's point of view.

Another potential visualization of these ambivalences, one that perhaps gets more directly into ambivalence 2, especially in terms of productive consumption and consumptive production is a 2006 drawing from Ingular Sing entitled 'big mouth';



Taking for granted that the above figure is a worker, if viewed as a producer / consumer, they seem to be in the process of being consumed by a pacman-like form that is attached to and surrounds the head, a kind of external and enlarged mouth that seems to be in the process of consuming its own head/body. To view this in social-factory terms, the worker is being consumed by their own mouth, the main tool of bodily consumption (and therefore a component part of producing labour-power), within a city-scape that we could perhaps posit as the surrounding social relations of production (as well as dead labour posing as fixed capital). To avoid over-interpretation, perhaps the single most striking element is this apparent self-consumption, in which the body, seen as a single entity, is inherently both consumer, and consumed. To relate this back to Tronti's opening lines in *Factory and Society*, there is the fact that capital *consumes* labour-power, but here, to the extent that the enlarged mouth is part of the body of the worker, it is a case of the worker consuming itself, perhaps more in line with the ghostly prospective Middlesex student-worker, it is a case of the worker being *consumed by consumption*. In the *Communiqué from an Absent Future*, the figure of the student is described in a perhaps similar way, "One's future position in the system, one's relation to others, is purchased first with money and then with the demonstration of obedience. First we pay, then we "work hard." **And there is the split:** one is both **commander and commanded, consumer and consumed.**" In this sense perhaps it's possible to see the above image in line with Tronti when he states that workers *embody* the class relation, perhaps as does the social – factory relation:

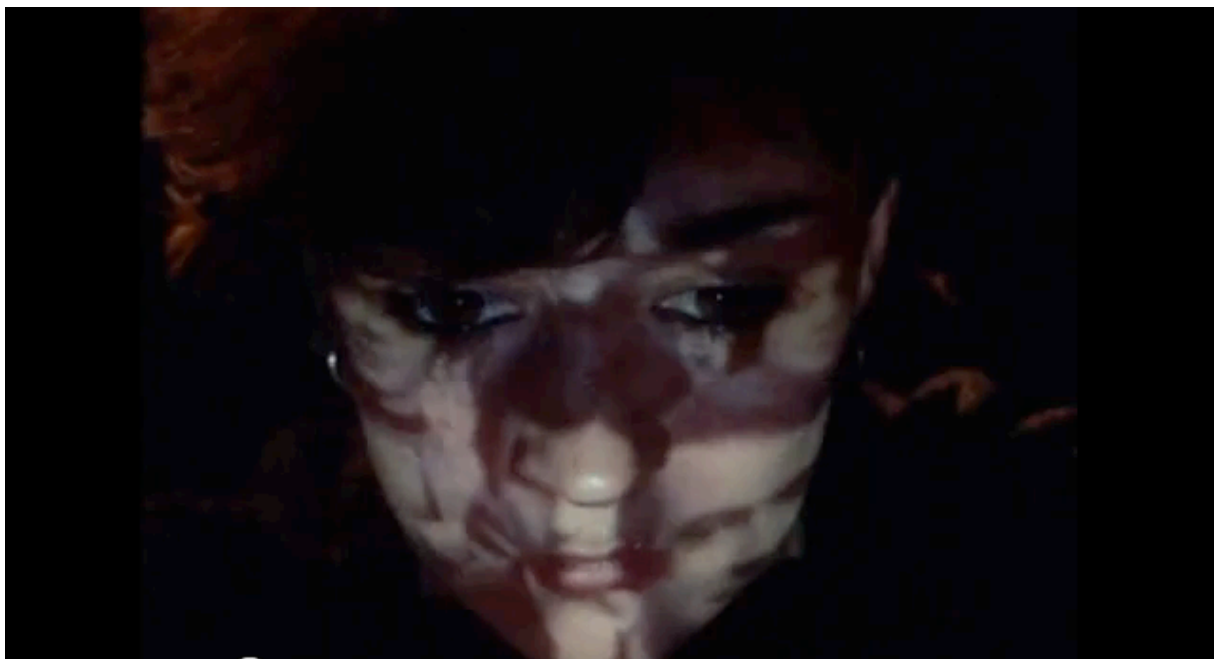
The worker is the *provider of capital*. In reality, he is the possessor of that unique, particular commodity which is the condition of all the other conditions of production. Because as we have seen, all these other conditions of production are, from the start, capital in themselves – a dead capital which, in order to come to life and into play in the social relations of production, **needs to subsume under itself labour-power**, as the subject and activity of capital. But, as we have also seen, this transition into social relations of production cannot occur unless **the class relation is introduced into it as its content**. And the class relationship is imposed from the very *first* moment and by the very fact that the proletariat is constituted as a class in the face of the capitalist. Thus the worker *provides* capital, not only insofar as he sells labour-power, **but also insofar as he embodies the class relation**. [Tronti, 1980]

The earlier depicted vision of a prospective postgraduate Middlesex student is perhaps another useful visualization here. The screen of 'employability' that masks the worker is precisely labour-power in its commodity form, the problem of course, and perhaps this is a central ambiguity facing labour struggles today, is that were one to individually tear down this screen of employability, it would only function to exclude oneself from possible access to the

wage, which is still the only means of subsistence for the majority who have nothing else to sell but their employable features (their labour-power as commodity). The difference (or perhaps analogy) to the 19th century textile workers who threw their machines into the street, is that this form of commodified labour-power is largely tied up within the body and livelihood of the worker as their employability, to destroy it individually means also destroying oneself. However (like the textile workers) it does seem possible to pose a *collective* attack on the machines of this employability, for example, in education, the refusal of the meritocratic system itself, the various levels of knowledge, the associated hierarchies, examinations and grades, or as one writer put it “a collective intervention of ... university students – who will all ... use the university, but refuse to receive their degrees.” [Weismann, 2009]

To return to Tronti’s above proposal; the request to look at the “circumstances of capital”, is perhaps in need of some elaboration. On the one hand it could mean to study the nature of corporations and financial institutions, which at present seems to be the dominant crisis discourse, on the other hand, as Tronti suggests, it means to study labour as a “material component” of capital. If workers focus on the conditions of work, they can only see as far as their own exploitation, as the conditions of work are what is provided, owned and controlled by capital. To focus on the conditions of capital then is a potentially empowering perspective, in as much as one can recognise that the conditions of capital are what is provided by the worker. Perhaps this is a little overly complicated in terms of carrying out workers’ inquiries. To a certain extent, at present, there is an initial need to return to the simple fact of exploitation at work (in the 24h per day sense), however, without the contrary focus, without recognising the role of work in the production of capital, any workers’ movement or anti-capitalist struggle has no chance of achieving its aims, at least not in the terms Tronti lays out. In *Politics at Work*, Tronti also seems to recognise this dual necessity, albeit fairly ironically, when he states; “It is time to engage in a new research project. Our theme is: work and politics. Yes, because it is a novelty to concern ourselves with this theme. It says a lot about the conditions we find ourselves in” [Tronti, 2008]. In regards to the other perspective, the focus on capital in the sense of the current media obsession with banks and finance capital he says that, “capitalist contradictions are only ever settlements of accounts between sections of the dominant forces: financialization against real economy, liberalisation versus regulation and vice versa, market and/or state, world distribution of energy resources and therefore pieces of the world against other pieces of the world, but still within a single thought of social relations:

the bosses - whether private or public - rule, and the workers comply” [Ibid.]. What’s disturbing at present is the extent to which - even amongst many Marxists, and key figures of the ‘left’ – financial capital is blamed for the evils currently being unleashed on people around the world. Even from an attentive non-Marxist perspective, it seems fairly obvious that the present crisis runs deeper than a few misbehaving financial whizkids, or CEO’s that got too greedy. It amounts to a nonsensical apology for a system with obvious contradictions; real wages that have constantly and massively declined over the last 30 or 40 years against the rising costs of living (and of reproducing oneself for the labour market), added to the fact that this backwards process has been supplemented by new forms of (and historically high amounts of) credit. What also seems obvious is the fact that at the root of a ‘credit crisis’ are people who work, who in order to continue buying things, or in many cases simply to survive, have sold their (potential) labour in the future in order to do so (and this ranges from vicious microcredit loans for India’s rural poor to the sub-prime mortgages of the proletarianized US middle class), which when added to the fact that unemployment generally seems only to rise (especially among young people, along with a massively increased strain on those lucky enough to keep their jobs), Chris Marker’s “crisis hypothesis”, seems appropriate; “Of course the crisis deteriorates until there is an explosion, either social or nuclear.” The current crisis, like all capitalist crises, isn’t specific to one form of capital, financial capital, it is a crisis of *capital*, in it’s totality, one that has of course been exacerbated by the dominance of financial capital.



Still from Chris Marker’s short film, *2084*, (1984). “*L’hypothèse grise, c’est l’hypothèse crise*”

Capital becomes increasingly dependent on labour-power; and so must possess it more completely, just as it possesses the natural forces of its production; it must reduce the working-class itself to a *natural force of society*. The more capitalist development advances, the more strongly the collective capitalist is compelled to view all labour within capital, it must control all movements – both inside and out - of labour-power, and is forced to plan the relationship between capital and labour in the long term, as a stability index for the social system. Once capital has conquered all the areas outside of production, in the strict sense, the process of its **internal colonization** begins; only then, when the cycle of bourgeois society finally brings - production, distribution, exchange and consumption – together [sich schliessen], can one speak quite intrinsically about the beginning of *capitalist development*. These points are joined by [gesellt sich] the process of the objective capitalization of the subjective forces of labour necessary to **the process of the material dissolution of the total worker and thus the worker her/himself, insofar as she/he is a worker**: they are **reduced to a property** of the capitalist mode of production and thus a *function of the capitalists*. It is clear that the integration of the working-class in the system is of vital necessity for capitalism: the rejection of this integration by the worker prevents the system from functioning. There is only one possible alternative: dynamic stabilization of the system or proletarian revolution.

The driving force then behind this explosive process, Tronti identifies as capital's increasing dependency on labour-power, which in being increasingly bound to capital, as well as seen within it, firstly appears as a natural force,⁴⁶ and secondly leads to the dissolution of the worker as such. Perhaps one point in the above that is unclear is the nature of the 'internal colonization'. Tronti seems to posit (apparently following the Leninist model) that capital, at some point, will reach a certain limit, at which moment the internal colonization process will begin (understood as the destruction of labour-power), thus creating the conditions of revolution. This is a major difference to Luxemburg's 'primitive accumulation', which is portrayed as a continual and systemically vital process, in the sense that capital is always internally colonizing by accumulating through destructive processes that destroy the actual long-term accumulation of capital. Perhaps this is one of the major flaws within *Factory and Society*, it misses out the fact that capitalist development always goes hand in hand with processes of underdevelopment, which is also a key analysis within Feminist-Marxism, and Wages For Housework.

⁴⁶ See Massimo De Angelis, *Next Lap in the Rat Race? From Sub-Prime Crisis to the "Impasse" of Global Capital*, (The Commoner, 2008) for more details on the contemporary mechanisms involved in tying peoples lives to the fates of various 'economies'. <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=52>

Marker's and Tronti's conclusions, on the other hand, seem to match; a catastrophe today, either manmade or natural (a "nuclear explosion"), in which large amounts of people die, and infrastructure is destroyed could also be interpreted as an instance of "dynamic stabilization" but only from a capitalist perspective; it would amount to a resetting of accumulation to zero, in a similar way perhaps to post-WWII capitalism in the face of massive amounts of infrastructural destruction and the death of a large proportion of the workforce. This outcome fits in well with the idea that today it's easier to imagine the end of the world, than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. The other option is the "social explosion", including the possibility of proletarian revolution, the imagination of which seems to fit into the task of Tronti's proposed "new research project" on work and politics, a research that, like Marker's trade union assemblage, needs to imagine possible forms, routes and scenarios for working-class organization, not necessarily 'new', but ones able to take up forgotten threads and discontinuities, and re-wire or re-fuse them.

An organization... without organization

Given that the working-class had to find a single adequate response at both levels, vis à vis both capitalist production and the official working-class movement, the solution which was adopted could scarcely have been otherwise. The situation demanded a specific form of self-organization, entirely within the class, based on a spontaneous passivity: **an organization**, in other words, **without organization** - which meant **not subject to bourgeois institutionalization**. [Tronti, 1972]

Factory and Society ends with a discussion of working-class organization, and the inherent revolutionary potential of the working-class. Despite a fundamental scepticism towards the strategy of a 'working-class' conquest of the state-apparatus, some of Tronti's arguments will be considered to the extent that they form a somewhat complex approach to this idea, and to sketch out their implications for a conception of the social-factory. The question of organization, especially self-organization and self-management are of course major topics (for 'society' as well as the 'factory'), so the topic will be discussed tangentially.

Marx says: "Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself." The process of capitalist production is inherently revolutionary; it holds all of its productive forces in constant movement and effects its incessant revolutionization, including those living and conscious productive forces of the working-class. The development of the productive forces is the 'historical mission' of capitalism. Although at the same time it *establishes* its main contradiction; the incessant development of the productive forces must necessarily drive the incessant

development of the greatest productive force, the working-class as a revolutionary class. [Tronti, 1962]

Whilst this idea has a certain appeal, it perhaps also demonstrates one of the flaws of a close-reading of *Das Kapital*, which, on the one hand, as Loren Goldner points out, was a phenomenology of a closed capitalist system, focussed on a specific section of a broader production process [Goldner, 2007], and as Wages For Housework have gone to great lengths to point out; any ‘development’ of productive forces of the working-class goes hand in hand with a simultaneous ‘underdevelopment’ process.⁴⁷ This could be understood in regards to the way students and houseworkers have increasingly experienced an increase of productive forces on the one hand, inasmuch as they have been increasingly pushed into waged labour – and on the other, within such development processes there are often hidden consequences that can be devastating for those involved, as well as for long-term capital accumulation (primitive accumulation). So while this element of underdevelopment is undeniable, and its consequences need to be made visible, there is also the fact that within the intensification of both paid and unpaid work the productive forces of labour also increase, which provides a greater scope e.g. for student struggles, because capital necessarily breaks down/transforms education (in the broadest sense) in order to increase its productive output. This also demonstrates capital’s dependence on increasingly integrating labour-power, a point which, however contradictory, it is also necessary for the working-class to take advantage of, or perhaps as Tronti seems to suggest, is precisely to be recognized as the central contradiction:

Here it should not be a case of forcibly eliminating all other contradictions, that are nevertheless available, and which more strongly catch the eye, therefore seeming to be more important in understanding the whole. It’s a matter of appropriating the basic principle: that at a certain stage of capitalist development, all contradictions between the various *parts* of capitalism, must come to be expressed in the basic contradiction between working-class and capitalism in its *entirety*, and it is solely at this point that the *process* of the socialist revolution begins. To express all the contradictions of capitalism *by means of* the working-class means in any case that those contradictions are irresolvable within capitalism and therefore are confined to the system that creates them. The working-class *within* capitalism then, is the only *irresolvable* contradiction of capitalism, or more precisely, it will be so from the moment in which it organizes as a revolutionary class. **Neither the organization of the oppressed class in defence of**

⁴⁷ “...there is an immediate connection between the strategy of the left for women and their strategy for the Third World. In the same way as they want to bring women to the factories, they want to carry factories to the Third World. In both cases, they presume that the ‘underdeveloped’ – those of us who are wageless and work at a lower technological level – are backward with respect to the ‘real working class’ and can catch up only by obtaining more advanced capitalist exploitation, a bigger share of the work of the factory. In both cases, then, the struggle the left offers to the wageless, the ‘underdeveloped’, is not a revolutionary struggle, a struggle against capital, but a struggle *for* capital, in a more rationalized, developed and productive form. In our case they offer us not only the ‘right to work’ (this they offer every worker), but the right to work more, the right to be further exploited.” [Federici, Cox, 1975: p.3]

workers' interests, nor the **organization of the class as a government**, and the management of capitalist interests - rather, organization as an antagonistic class: *the political self-management of the working-class within the economic system of capitalism*. [Tronti, 1962]

Tronti's approach then is not in fact to create a working-class government, but - recognizing the central contradiction of capitalism as the working-class itself, and therefore its inherently antagonistic relation to capital - it is the organization of the antagonism itself, political self-management, or as he states in *Struggle Against Labour*; "**the organization of alienation**: This is the only possible direction in which the party can lead the **spontaneity** of the class" [Tronti, 1972]. There are then three important terms within Tronti's conception of revolution, that are worth delving into; organization, party and spontaneous passivity.

Spontaneity for Tronti is directly related to the historical passivity of a defeated working-class; "it's refusal to consider itself an active participant in capitalist society, is already an opting out of the game, a flouting of the social interest ... a refusal to develop and stabilize capital" [Ibid.]. In terms then of the *strategy of refusal*, at a fundamental level the passivity of the working class is already a refusal of work, however this refusal lacks a political articulation - in order to become political refusal, there is a need to overcome passivity: "This can only be achieved on one sole condition: that this passivity is recognized as an elementary, spontaneous form of refusal by the working-class" [Ibid.]. The "organization... without organization" then is the (non) form of this spontaneous passivity, which Tronti states is to be consciously transformed into the organizational form of the party. On the one side then if struggle remains at the level of spontaneous passivity, it always remains an isolated struggle to stay *outside* of subjection to "bourgeois institutionalization", on the other, the recognition of this spontaneous passivity as an organized working-class means struggling from the centrality of the working-class *within* the broader system.

From the very beginning the proletariat is nothing more than an immediate *political interest* in the abolition of every aspect of the existing order. As far as its internal development is concerned, it has no need of "institutions" in order to bring to life what it is, since what it is nothing other than the *life-force* of that immediate destruction. **It doesn't need institutions, but it does need organisation**. Why? In order to render the political instance of the antagonism objective in the face of capital; in order to articulate this instance within the present reality of the class relationship, at any given moment; in order to shape it into a rich and aggressive force, in the short term, through the *weapon of tactics*. This, which is necessary for the seizure of power, is also necessary *before* the need to seize power has arisen, Marx discovered the existence of the working class long before there were forms to express it politically: thus, for Marx, there is *a class even in the absence of the party*. [...] The capitalists have not yet

invented – and in fact will obviously never be able to invent – a **non-institutionalised political power**. That type of political power is specifically working-class power. The difference between the two classes at the level of political power is precisely this. **The capitalist class does not exist independently of the formal political institutions**, through which, at different times but in permanent ways, they exercise their political domination: for this very reason, smashing the bourgeois State does mean destroying the power of the capitalists, and by the same token, one could only hope to destroy that power by smashing the State machine. On the other hand, quite **the opposite is true of the working class; it exists independently of the institutionalised levels of its organization**. This is why destroying the workers' political party does not mean – and has not meant – dissolving, dismembering, or destroying the class organism of the workers. [Tronti, 1980]

On the one hand the working-class has a fundamental existence even outside of any institutional forms, presumably because it is the central component of the capitalist system that, on the other hand, vitally depends upon its institutional form, without which it cannot exist. The organization then of the working-class is neither governmental nor institutional, and within the antagonistic relationship to capital, even entails a 'smashing of the bourgeois state machine.' There seems to be a certain organic connection between what Tronti describes as two forms of refusal; one spontaneously passive, the other conscious of spontaneous passivity as the basis of its political existence. If its possible to think class in the absence of both Marx and Tronti here (the question could be posed; does the class exist in the absence of Marx?), the two forms of struggle seem fundamentally intertwined. To relate back to the discussion of re-thinking inside/outside relations, it seems necessary here to pose a potentially fluid relation between the conscious and unconscious, the inside and outside, the individual and the mass. Mark Fisher's question; "what if you held a protest and everyone came?" [Fisher, 2009: p.12] seems appropriate. Isn't this somehow the desire of Tronti when he posits the 'workers' party'? Doesn't it entail a mass consciousness of this Marxist class? Haven't the huge range of protests over the past few years - which all seem to be largely influenced by the current form of the capitalist (necro/colonial/imperial/political/economic) system - had a certain interplay between spontaneous passivity and broader and more active forms of protest and revolution? Perhaps, however Tronti himself is also pointing in this direction:

It is today no longer a problem of whether workers are approached with a political consciousness *from outside*, or whether the party form can be externally applied. The solution has already been found; **it is dictated directly by capitalist development**, by a capitalist production that ultimately encounters the limits of bourgeois society, it is dictated by the factory, which has now extended its exclusive domination over the whole of society: **political consciousness** must be **supported by a party**, but from **within the interior of the production process**. No one believes today that a revolutionary process is at all possible without the *political organization* of the working-class, without a *workers party*. But too many still think that the party could

lead that revolution when it remains *in front of the factory gates*, that political action begins where production ends, and that the *general* struggle against this system is to be found within the lead positions of the bourgeois state, that in the meantime has become a *specific* expression of the social needs of capitalist production. To be precise: it is not a question of abandoning the Leninist subversion of the state machine, as it will inevitably be for those who follow the democratic path. It is about the groundwork for **the overthrow of the state within society**, in order **to dissolve society within the production process**, to eliminate **the relations of production** within the **social relations of the factory**. The machinery of the bourgeois state must now be destroyed within the capitalist factory. [Tronti, 1962]

It is perhaps not so much a clear decision against spontaneous passivity, but a matter of the workers' party supporting political consciousness, and doing it within the production process, so a consciousness of the 'factory as working-class' within the socialized relations of production, that is positioned against 'society as capital'. The aim then is also to dissolve this 'society', and its relations of production within the production process, the social relations of the factory. To underline this point, it turns out that Tronti's conception of overthrowing the state, means, firstly to locate it within the diffuse **capitalist factory**, the place then where the state can be overthrown is in fact within society itself.

The remaining question then is to the precise organizational form of the working-class party, in *Struggle Against Labour* Tronti states; "The party must be the organization of what already exists within the class, but which the class alone cannot succeed in organizing" [Tronti, 1972]. It seems then that Tronti's 'party', is also subject to this 'social--factory' relation, not an avant-garde that emerges to lead the partially conscious masses, but the organization of that which already exists in the class, perhaps in this sense it is only within the becoming conscious of spontaneous passivity, and of the political power of the working-class that organization is to be understood, not a clear cut theoretical prescription for struggle, but whichever forms political consciousness takes, that which emerges from the mix of "theoretical analysis and practical struggle";

To reference here the overriding necessity of following the right path - through theoretical analysis and practical struggle – may be sufficient. **Factory - Society - State** are the points at which, **scientific theory and subversive practice co-incide today**: the *analysis of capitalism and the workers' revolution*. That would suffice to prove the accuracy of this path. The "scientific concept" of the factory now opens the way to the most comprehensive understanding of the present, and the same time its most comprehensive destruction. [Tronti, 1962]

Perhaps in that sense it is also possible to understand Tronti when he states that organization "is dictated directly by capitalist development"; it seems not to be the case of an intellectual

or political leadership, that preaches a higher knowledge of class-struggle to the working-masses, but a recognition of one's own place and labour-power, precisely inasmuch as it forms part of the political working-class as such. In a similar way to the dissolution of the factory within society, it's possible to posit 'working-class organization' itself to have merged with the social relations of production, especially to the extent that mobile phones, computers, social networks etc. are simultaneously important elements of work and productivity, as well as tools for organizing against exactly that.

Fuck Conclusions

Is it possible then to *conclude* something concerning the social-factory? Is it a question of measuring one definition with another, seeing who got it right, of playing academic games? Is it a tangible object, a fluid space? Is it only a perspective, or is it a concrete and totalizing everything within which workers toil? What would it mean, or is it possible to visualize *the workers leaving the social-factory*?

It could be concluded that the social-factory *is* the class-perspective, updated for the contemporary era; the tool and viewpoint with which to smash our everyday factory lives, to destroy our labour-power as commodity; the site within which both labour and labour-power are likewise absent and ambivalent; the place where the working-class can move from spontaneous passivity to political refusal; the conflictual whole that sooner or later will stand within and against itself, either as nuclear or social explosion, 'dynamic stabilization' or proletarian revolution. These things could be concluded. However, and perhaps this is the genuine non-conclusion, what does it mean to write and to say 'society is a factory', or indeed, that 'society is not a factory', what is the act of conclusion in social-factory terms? If thinking in terms of the social-factory it cannot be a matter of conclusion, as the conclusion will always have a political function in need of questioning, so it is an ongoing process, a theorem or indeed *thaeces*, to be verified, or not, in struggle.

Instead of concluding this or that facet of the social-factory then, some proposals instead; to take the social-factory as an experimental perspective, not to find out its 'true' meaning but to view the intricacies of one's environment from both the labour and valorization viewpoint, that is both as worker *and* as capitalist - separately but in their unity; to take up Tronti's

proposal for a new research project on *politics at work*, that is both the study of the extent to which politics is simply ‘doing business’, as well as the potential political power of the expanded workplace; to turn spontaneously passive refusal into a collective and political activity again, based on the non-existence of human capital and the necessary existence of labour-power; to recognize that the ‘necro’ of capitalism is inherent, that it is as necessary to its functioning as labour-power is, so there’s a need to recognize the processes of primitive accumulation that go on around us; to radically rethink political subjectivity as an experimental, and perhaps necessarily schizophrenic practice, to re-locate what we thought we knew in the what is to be found out; to even perhaps reject such attempts at academic rationality, and polite conversation as presented here in this paper and to let in the mentally ‘ill’ and emotionally unstable outside; in a word, to say, fuck conclusions.

Notes on Consumption – Prosumers & Conducers

You are the consumer, we are the producer. So now we need a bridge, a unity.

[Amirul Haque Amin, President of the National Garment Workers' Federation (NGWF) a leading Bangladeshi trade union, addressing a journalist]⁴⁸

Labour uses up its material factors, its subject and its instruments, consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption. Such productive consumption is distinguished from individual consumption by this, that the latter uses up products, as means of subsistence for the living individual; the former, as means whereby alone, labour, the labour-power of the living individual, is enabled to act. **The product, therefore, of individual consumption, is the consumer himself; the result of productive consumption, is a product distinct from the consumer.** [Karl Marx, Capital: [The Labour-Process And The Process Of Producing Surplus-Value](#)]

... There is a **consumptive production** and a **productive consumption**. Or one finally discovers a mutual dependency: **production as means for consumption**, and **consumption as goal of production**. Finally one can be represented as the realisation of the other, and vice versa: **consumption consumes the product, production produces the consumption**. ... "The important thing to emphasize here is only that ... production and consumption ... appear in any case as moments of one process, in which production is the real point of departure and hence also the predominant moment ... the act through which the whole process again runs its course." Production, distribution, exchange and consumption are *not* identical; rather they all form "the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity." It's clear that within this "organic whole" the various moments mutually interact. Production as well, *in its one-sided form*, is defined by the other moments. Yet "**production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well.**" From there the process begins again anew. "A definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as **definite relations between these different moments.**" The necessity to recapitulate these elementary terms of Marx is all too often documented in the objective existence of the many "Marxists" who tend to repeat the "ineptitude" of the economists, "who portray production as an eternal truth while banishing history to the realm of distribution." [Tronti, 1962]

The question of consumption, and consumerism is a broad one, so here are some quotations and thoughts for possibly rethinking certain elements. What most strongly emerges when thinking of 'consumption' today in the strict sense of buying things, as well as processes of bodily consumption, is that consumption, and even the cult of consumerism are forms of work. This seems to fit in with Tronti when he points to the way that production exercises an influence over distribution, exchange and consumption; what is perhaps not so deeply addressed is the extent to which it is consumption itself which has consumed the other areas.

⁴⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=II09u-wPNEY&feature=relmfu>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voVgTkTUKFc&feature=related>

In that case, as a corollary to, or even as replacement for, the social-factory, there needs to be some idea of the diffused, social relations of consumption, perhaps what could be posited as the social-supermarket. In the *Power of Living Knowledge*, Gigi Roggero points to this confusion in his discussion of the ‘prosumer’;

Should customers of the telephone company 3 need online assistance, they will be surprised by what they find on the dedicated area of its website. Those that respond to them are not in fact technicians paid by the company, but rather – through a free forum – other customers. For the best responses 3 rewards the contributors with modest prizes. Above all, the firm draws up monthly charts in which those that contribute to the forum can see their own value and merit recognised. If, however, posts are made that insinuate doubt about 3’s use of unpaid work, within a few minutes the message gets deleted from the forum. [Roggero, 2009]

The question then is social-factory, or supermarket? But in fact it doesn’t matter, as sites that organically combine both consumption and production, it is perhaps hard to see a difference today. The proposal then here would be to discuss the work-like quality of consumerism, is it possible, following Wages for School and Housework, to posit a campaign that demands wages for the act of shopping? Even the most excessively ridiculous act of purchasing is objectively a component part of a production line that produces surplus value, and shopping is also then an expenditure of a certain amount of labour power. As previously mentioned, this was perhaps given its full significance when US consumers were bombarded by the media following the 2008 meltdown, with the patriotic cry to “shop for America”, that is to rescue the crumbling financial sector from their own pockets.

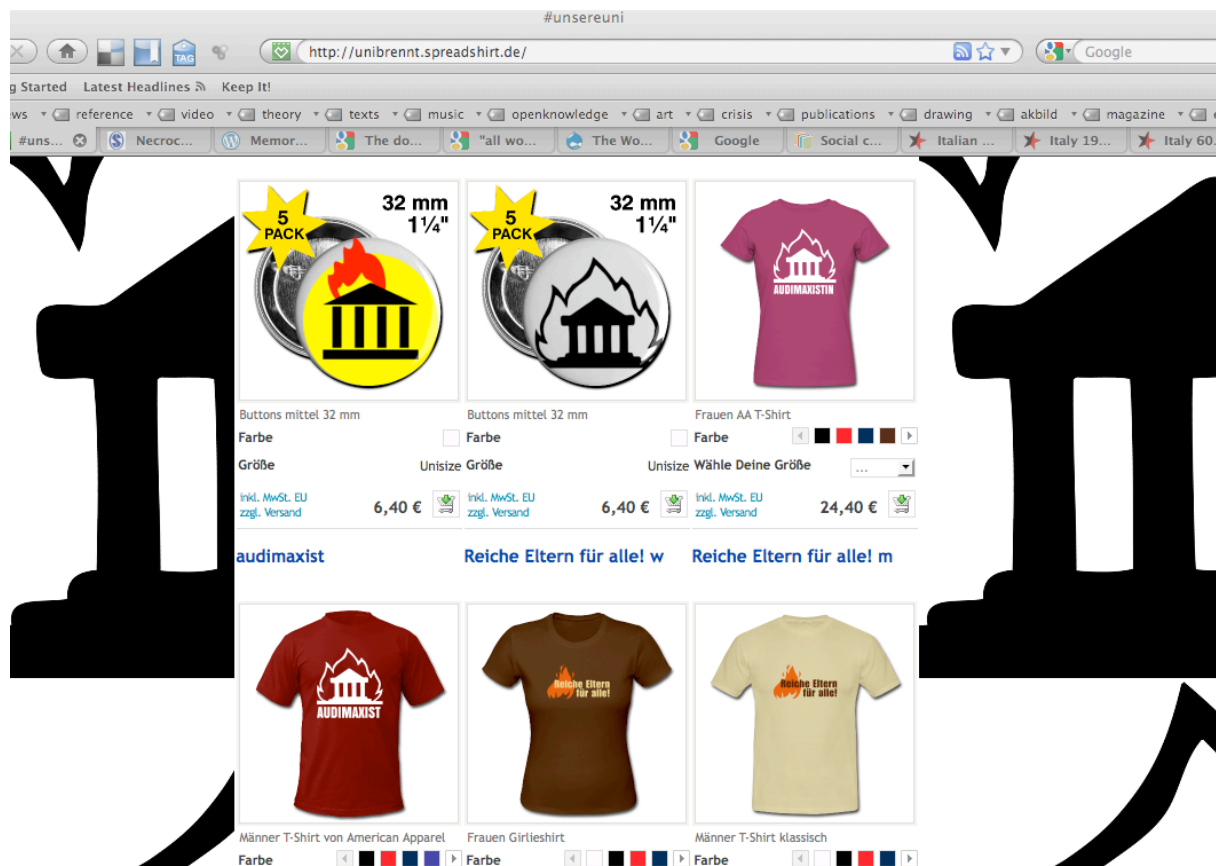
We think that we are consumers at christmas time... No! We are being consumed... at christmas time ...

we have millions of americans in our bodies

[Reverend Billy, *What Would Jesus Buy?*, 2007]

Reverend Billy’s ‘Church of Stop Shopping’, a strange mix of anti-consumerist activism, and religious sensibility, has repeatedly intervened in spaces of shopping, especially at peak shopping seasons (e.g. Christmas) to try and stop people shopping. A very different, but somehow also similar protest has been taken up by the anti-budget cuts group UK-Uncut, who occupy large department stores, mobile phone companies etc. en masse, completely closing down consumption with the general demand that companies pay their full taxes. The demand for the moment seems fairly reformist, but it seems only a matter of time until sites of consumption become sites for the *struggle against labour*. Both UK-Uncut and the Church of

Stop Shopping are effectively activist groups that put a spanner in the works of the social relations of production. Perhaps on this point it is also interesting to look back at histories of struggles against, or on the sites of consumption, one example might be the self-reduction campaigns in 1960s Italy, wherein large organized communities and groups of people set their own ‘fair’ prices, from bus fares (by making their own tickets) to energy bills (by pressuring energy companies).



One instance that consolidated some of these thoughts, was the confrontation with the commodification of a series of protests/occupations in which this author was involved, the ‘uni-brennt’ movement. The above image shows an online store where American Apparel t-shirts can be purchased that display the main logo of the movement, and some popular slogans. Strangely enough, this image is the perfect place to see the organic whole of production-distribution-exchange-consumption, in a way it embodies the idea that there is no outside to capitalism, especially as this page was up and running already in the early days of the movement, so the commodification was instantaneous. Furthermore, I remember sitting in

an office and watching the design of the above logo, as well as hearing someone laughing for the first time about the slogan ‘reiche Eltern für alle’ (rich parents for everyone), and now seeing those processes in valorized form, presented in neat rows, with their price tags, it is completely clear that even the act of protest itself, falls squarely in the social-factory nexus. However, if its possible to take Tronti seriously, this does not mean defeat for working-class protest or uprising, rather it simply reaffirms the need to see labour-power where normally only capital appears. The above image, inasmuch as it is a global product, based on a vast system of relations of exploitation, is one point upon a global production line within which it *is* possible to intervene, the first step though is the recognition of labour-power, with which it will be possible to practice political refusal.

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