# Round 4

#### Technology has fundamentally altered the way capitalism operates. In the 20th century the vision was of a future full of growth and development. New technologies would arise and the future would be infinitely better. The fundamental shift happened when machines were infused with us. We are so connected to technology, that we have become the technology. We exist in the period *after the future*.

​​(Franco ‘Bifo’ **Berardi 2011** is a writer and theorist based in Bologna. His work revolves mainly around the aesthetics of the contemporary psychosphere. His latest books include Futurability, Phenomenology of the End, and The Soul at Work. In the 1970s he was one of the founders of the pirate radio station Radio Alice, the magazine A/traverso and of the political movement Autonomia,  “After the Future”, <https://libcom.org/files/AfterFuture.pdf>)

For us, dwellers of the postmodern conurbation, driving back home from the office, stuck and immovable in the traffic jam of rush hour, Marinetti’s adoration of the car seems a little bit ludicrous. But **the reality and concept of the machine have changed a hundred years after the Futurist Manifesto. Futurism exalted the machine as an external object, visible in the city**

**landscape, but now the machine is inside us: we are no longer obsessed with the external machine; instead, the “info-machine”** now **intersects with the social nervous system,** the “bio-machine” interacts with the genetic becoming of the human organism. **Digital and bio-technologies have turned the external machine of iron and steel into the internalised and recombining machine of the bio-info era. The bio-info machine is no more separable from the body and the mind, because it is no more an external tool, but an internal transformer of the body and of the mind,** a linguistic and cognitive enhancer. Now **the nano-machine is mutating the human brain and the linguistic ability to produce and communicate.** The Machine is us. In the mechanical era the machine stood in front of the body, and changed human behaviour, enhancing their potency without changing their physical structure. **The assembly line, for instance, although improving and increasing. the productive power of laborers did not modify their physical organism nor introduce mutations inside their cognitive ability. Now the machine is no more in front of the body but inside it.** Bodies and minds therefore cannot express and relate anymore without the technical support of the bio machine. Because of this change **political power has changed its nature. When the machine was external the State had to regulate the body and for this used the law. Agencies of repression were used in order to force the conscious organisms to submit to that rhythm without rebellion. Now the political domination is internalized and is undistinguishable from the machine itself.** Not only the machine but also the machinic imagination undergoes a mutation during this passage. Marinetti conceived the machine in the modern way, like an external enhancer. In the bio-social age the machine is difference of

information: not exteriority but linguistic modeling, logic and cognitive

automatism, internal necessity.

#### Movements against bourgeoisie capitalism have failed. We have entered the stage of the infosphere where the brain intersects with the machine, and must produce infinitely more. At the same time, hope for the worker is gone.

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By the end of the decade, notwithstanding the victory of Barack Obama in the United States, the prospect was gloomy. **Corporate capitalism and neoliberalism have produced lasting damage in the material structures of the world and in the social, cultural, and nervous systems of humankind.** In the century's last decade, a new movement emerged and grew fast and wide, questioning everywhere the power of capitalist corporations. I use the word "movement" to describe a collective displacing of bodies and minds, a changing of consciousness, habits, expectations. Movement means conscious change, change accompanied by collective consciousness and collective elaboration, and struggle. Conscious. Collective. Change. This is the meaning of "movement." **From Seattle 1999 to Genoa 2001 a movement tried to stop the capitalist devastation of the very conditions of civilized life. These were the stakes, no more, no less. Activists around the world had a simple message: if we don't stop the machine of exploitation, debt, and compulsory consumption, human cohabitation on the planet will become dismal, or impossible.** Well, **ten years after Seattle, in the wake of the 2009 Copenhagen summit failure, we can state that those people were speaking the truth. The global movement against capitalist globalization reached an impressive range** and pervasiveness, **but it was never able to change the daily life of society.** It remained an ethical movement, not a social transformer. It could not create a process of social recomposition, it could not produce an effect of social subjectivation. Those people were silenced by President Bush, after the huge demonstrations of February 1 5, 2003, when many millions of people worldwide gathered in the streets against the war in Iraq. The absence of movement is visible today, at the end of the zero zero decade: the absence of an active culture, the lack of a public sphere, the void of collective imagination, palsy of the process of subjectivation. The path to a conscious collective subject seems obstructed. What now? A conscious collective change seems impossible at the level of daily life. Yes, I know, change is happening everyday, at a pace that we have never experienced before. What is the election of a black President in the United States if not change? But change is not happening in the sphere of social consciousness. **Change happens in the spectacular sphere of politics, not in daily life-and the relationship between politics and daily life has become so tenuous, so weak, that sometimes I think that, whatever happens in politics, life will not change.** The fantastic collapse of the economy is certainly going to change things in daily life: you can bet on it. But is this change consciously elaborated? Is this connected with some conscious collective action? It isn't. This is why neoliberal fanaticism, notwithstanding its failure, is surviving and driving the agenda of the powers of the world. **The** so-called counter globalization **movement**, born in Seattle at the close of the century, has been a collective conscious actor, a movement of unprecedented strength and breadth. But, I repeat, it **has changed nothing in the daily life of the masses; it hasn't changed the relationship between wage labor and capitalist enterprise; it hasn't changed daily relationships among precarious workers; it hasn't changed the lived conditions of migrants. It hasn't created solidarity between people in the factories, in the schools, in the cities. Neoliberal politics have failed, but social autonomy hasn't emerged.** The ethical consciousness of the insanity of neoliberal politics spread everywhere, but it did not shape affective and social relations between people. The movement remains an expression of ethical protest. It has, nonetheless, produced effects. The neoliberal ideology that was once accepted as the word of God, as a natural and indisputable truth, started to be questioned and widely denounced in the days following the Seattle riots. But the ethical demonstrations did not change the reality of social domination. Global corporations did not slow the exploitation of labor or the massive destruction of the planet's environment. Warmongers did not stop organizing and launching deadly attacks against civilian populations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and many other parts of the world. Why? Why did the largest demonstration in human history, the antiwar Global Action that the movement launched on February 15, 2003, fail to stop the bombing of Baghdad? Why was conscious collective action, although massive and global, unable to change things? This is the question I've been trying to answer for the last ten years. This is the question that I am trying to answer in this book. I'll say here, in shore, that the answer is not to be found in the political strategy of the struggle, but in the structural weakness of the social fabric**. During the twentieth century,** social struggle could change things in a collective and conscious way because industrial workers could maintain solidarity and unity in daily life, and so could fight and win. **Autonomy was the condition of victory, because autonomy means the ability to create social solidarity in daily life, and the ability to self-organize outside the rules of labor and exploitation.** Autonomous community was the condition of political strength. When social recomposition is possible, so is collective conscious change. In social history we can speak of recomposition when the forces of labor create common cultural flows and a common ground of sensibility, so that they become a collective actor, sharing the same questions and sometimes the same answers. In conditions of social recomposition, social autonomy from capital becomes possible. Autonomy is the possibility of meeting the power of capital, with counterpower in daily life, in factories, neighborhoods, homes, in the affective relationships between people. **That seems to be over. The organization of labor has been fragmented by the new technology, and workers' solidarity has been broken at its roots.** The labor market has been globalized, but the political organization of the workers has not. **The infosphere has dramatically changed and accelerated,** and this is **jeopardizing the very possibility of communication, empathy, and solidarity.**

#### Thus, the role of the ballot is to vote for the debater that best deconstructs semiocapitalism. Prefer:

#### The creation of the infosphere, and the infusion of labor with technologies is a new frontier of semiocapitalism. The net enabled infinite spaces of productivity and creation. But growth cannot be infinite, the limit is time. While cyberspace is now infinite, time can’t be. The brain is subjected to infinite information but can’t take it because its processors can never be infinite. The new limit to growth is not land, labor or capital, but the capacity of the human nervous system.

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**Semiocapital puts neuropsychical energies to work, and submits them to the speed of electronic machinery.** It compels our cognition, **our emotional hardware to follow the rhythm of net-productivity. Cyberspace overloads cybertime, because cyberspace is an unbounded sphere, whose speed can accelerate without limits. But cybertime (the time of attention, memory, and imagination) cannot speed beyond a limit. Otherwise, it cracks. And it is** actually **cracking, collapsing under the stress of hyper-productivity. An epidemic of panic is spreading throughout the circuits of the social brain. An epidemic of depression is following the outbreak of panic**. The crisis of the new economy at the beginning of the zero zero decade has to be seen as consequence of this nervous breakdown. **Once upon a time Marx spoke about overproduction,** meaning the excess of available goods that could not be absorbed by the social market**. In the sphere of net-production it is the social brain that is assaulted by an overwhelming supply of attention-demanding goods. This is why the social factory has become the factory of unhappiness: the assembly line of net-production is directly exploiting the emotional energy of the virtual class**. We have to become aware of it; **we have to recognize ourselves as cognitarians. Flesh, body, desire, in permanent electro-stimulation**. Biologist, philosopher and journalist at the same time, Kevin Kelly was the animator of CoEvolution Quarterly in the ’80s, then editor of Wired magazine for many years. In his book Out of Control, he speaks of a bio-informatic Super-organism which is the result of the synergy of uncountable human minds, and is placed outside of the reach of human control, understanding and government: 

#### The myth of infinite growth overworks the subject and environment. Not only physical resources but also workers intellectual skills are pushed to the brink and exhausted.

Bifo, Franco **Berardi 4**. "The Future after the End of the Economy." *E-flux Journal* (2011).

**Growth, in the economic sense, is not about increasing social happiness and satisfying people’s basic needs.** It is about expanding the global volume of exchange value for the sake of profit. Gross national product, the main indicator of growth, is not a measure of social welfare and pleasure, but a monetary measure, while social happiness or unhappiness is generally not dependent on the amount of money circulating in the economy. It is dependent, rather, on the distribution of wealth and the balance between cultural expectations and the availability of physical and semiotic goods. **Growth is a cultural concept more than an economic criterion** for the evaluation of social health and well-being. It is **linked to the modern conception of the future as infinite expansion.** For many reasons, **infinite expansion has become an impossible task for the social body.** Since the Club of Rome published the book The Limits to Growth in 1972, we have understood that Earth’s natural resources are limited and that social production has to be redefined according to this knowledge. 2 But **the cognitive transformation of production and the creation of a semiocapitalist sphere opened up new possibilities for expansion.** In the 1990s the overall economy expanded euphorically while the net economy was expected to usher in the prospect of infinite growth. **This was a deception.** Even if the general intellect is infinitely productive, the **limits to growth are inscribed in** the affective body of cognitive work: **limits of attention, of psychic energy, of sensibility.** After the illusions of the new economy – spread by the wired neoliberal ideologists – and the deception of the dot-com crash, the beginning of the new century announced the coming collapse of the financial economy. Since September 2008 we know that, notwithstanding the financial virtualization of expansion, the end of capitalist growth is in sight. This will be a curse if social welfare is indeed dependent on the expansion of profits and if we are unable to redefine social needs and expectations. But it will be a blessing if we can distribute and share existing resources in an egalitarian way, and if we can shift our cultural expectations in a frugal direction, replacing the idea that pleasure depends on ever-growing consumption. 4. Recession and Financial Impersonal Dictatorship **Modern culture has equated economic expansion with the future**, so that for economists, it is impossible to consider the future independently of economic growth. But this identification has to be abandoned and the concept of the future rethought. The economic mind cannot make the jump to this new dimension, it cannot understand this paradigm shift. This is why the economy is in crisis and why economic wisdom cannot cope with the new reality. **The financial semiotization of the economy is a war machine that daily destroys social resources and intellectual skills.** Look at what is happening in Europe. **After centuries of industrial production the European continent is rich, with millions of technicians, poets, doctors, inventors, specialized factory workers, nuclear engineers,** and so forth**. So how did we suddenly become so poor? Something very simple happened. The entirety of the wealth that workers produced was poured into the strongboxes of a minuscule minority of exploiters and speculators. The whole mechanism of the European financial crisis is oriented towards** the most extraordinary **displacement of wealth** in history: from society **towards the financial class**, towards financial capitalism. **The wealth produced by the collective intelligence has been siphoned off and expropriated,** leading to the impoverishment of the richest places in the world and the creation of a financial machine that destroys use value and displaces monetary wealth. **Recession is the economic way of semiotizing the present contradiction between the productive potency of the general intellect and its financial constraints. Finance is an effect of the virtualization of reality acting on the psycho-cognitive sphere of the economy.** But at the same time, finance is an effect of the deterritorialization of wealth. It is not easy to identify financial capitalists as individual persons, just as finance is not the monetary counterpart of a certain number of physical goods. Rather, it is an effect of language. It is the transversal function of immaterialization and the performative action of indexicality – statistics, figures, indexes, fears, and expectations are not linguistic representations of some economic referent that can be found somewhere in the physical world, as signifiers referring to a signified. They are performative acts of speech producing immediate effects in the very instant of their enunciation. This is why, **when you try to seek out the financial class, you cannot talk with someone**, negotiate, **or fight against an enemy.** There are no enemies, no persons with whom to negotiate. **There are only mathematical implications**, automatic social concatenations that one cannot dismantle, or even avoid. **Finance seems inhumane and pitiless because it is not human and therefore has no pity.** It can be defined as a mathematical cancer traversing a large part of society. Those who are involved in the financial game are far more numerous than the personal owners of the old bourgeoisie. Often unwittingly and unwillingly, people have been dragged into investing their money and their future in the financial game. Those who have invested their pensions in private funds, those who have signed mortgages half-consciously, those who have fallen into the trap of easy credit have become part of the transversal function of finance. They are poor people, workers, and pensioners whose futures depend on the fluctuations of a stock market they do not control or fully understand. 5. Future Exhaustion and Happy Frugality Only if we are able to disentangle the future (the perception of the future, the concept of the future, and the very production of the future) from the traps of growth and investment will we find a way out of the vicious subjugation of life, wealth, and pleasure to the financial abstraction of semiocapital. The key to this disentanglement can be found in a new form of wisdom: harmonizing with exhaustion. **Exhaustion is a cursed word in the frame of modern culture, which is based on the cult of energy and the cult of male aggressiveness. But energy is fading** in the postmodern world for many reasons that are easy to detect. Demographic trends reveal that, as life expectancy increases and birth rate decreases, mankind as a whole is growing old. This process of general aging produces a sense of exhaustion, and what was once considered a blessing – increased life expectancy – may become a misfortune if the myth of energy is not restrained and replaced with a myth of solidarity and compassion. **Energy is fading** also **because basic physical resources such as oil are doomed to extinction** or dramatic depletion. And **energy is fading because competition** is stupid **in the age of the general intellect.** The general intellect is not based on juvenile impulse and male aggressiveness, on fighting, winning, and appropriation. It is based on cooperation and sharing. **This is why the future is over.** We are living in a space that is beyond the future. If we come to terms with this post-futuristic condition, we can renounce accumulation and growth and be happy sharing the wealth that comes from past industrial labor and present collective intelligence. If we cannot do this, we are doomed to live in a century of violence, misery, and war

#### The system semiocapitalism created is too complex for even it to understand. This leaves us unable to deal with threats like climate change because the web of the infosphere is simply too complex.

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This is why **the future is no longer a comfortable subject.** We have understood that **it is not liable to be known,** as we have understood that **the lines of intersection between the info-assemblages are so complex and fast that we cannot reduce them to any scientific law.** And we are starting to doubt that the future can be governed by political strategies and military strength. **Every time political leaders of the world meet in those funny events called G8 or G20, the failure of political power – their lack of grasp on the future – becomes more evident.** When they met in Sapporo, Hokkaido, in July 2008, and in L’Aquila in July 2009, **the powerful men and women who lead the nations were supposed to take very important decisions on the crucial subject of climate change, and its effects on the planetary ecosystem. But they were completely unable to say and to do anything meaningful,** so they have decided that **in 2050 toxic emissions will be reduced by half. How? Why? No answer. No political or technological action has been taken, no shorter deadline has been decided upon. Such a decision is like a shaman’s ritual, like a rain dance. The complexity of the problem exceeds the power of knowledge and influence of world politicians.** The future has escaped from the hands of political technique, and everything has capsized, perhaps because of speed. Absolute speed means the ubiquity of mind; not of the body, not of sensibility. Absolute speed is made possible by the connection of signs. An all-pervading semiosis is secreted by uncountable connected brains. What are the effects on the social psychosphere? What is the acceleration going to produce in the field of erotic sensitivity, and in the very perception of others as embodied, as living organisms?

#### Labor in the technosphere has become fractionalized. Value used to be associated with input and time. I.e. if you worked on the assembly line for an hour you could make 200 shoes and that had a certain worth. In the technological job sphere the value of work is immaterial. You can’t measure input anymore because that input doesn’t exist in the physical reality. The cognitariat is not producing goods but rather investing their social energies in the web of semiocapitalism.

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Precariousness is itself a precarious notion, because it defines its object in an approximate manner, but also because from this notion derive paradoxical, self-contradictory, in other words precarious strategies. If we concentrate our critical attention on the precarious character of job performance what kind of program can we propose, to which target can we aspire? That of a stable job guaranteed for life? This would be (and this actually is) a cultural regression, the definite subordination of labor to the rule of exploitation. Notwithstanding the idea of Flexicurity which has been circulated, we are still far from having a strategy of social recomposition of the labor movement to extricate ourselves from unlimited exploitation. We need to pick up again the thread of analysis of social composition and decompositon if we want to distinguish possible lines of a process of recomposition to come. In the 1970s the energy crisis, the consequent economic recession and finally the substitution of work with numerical machines resulted in the formation of a large number of people with no guarantees. Since then the question of **precariousness became central to social analysis, but also in the ambitions of the movement. We began by proposing to struggle for forms of guaranteed income, uncoupled from work,** in order to face the fact that a large part of the young population had no prospect of guaranteed employment. The situation has changed since then, because **what seemed a marginal and temporary condition has now become the prevalent form of labor relations. Precariousness is no longer a marginal and provisional characteristic, but it is the general form of the labor relation in a productive, digitalized sphere**, reticular and recombinant. The word **“precariat”** generally **stands for the area of work that is no longer definable by fixed rules relative to the labor relation, to salary and the length of the working day**. However if we analyze the past, we see that these rules functioned only for a limited period in the history of relations between labor and capital. Only **for a short period at the heart of the 20th century, under the political pressures of unions and workers,** in conditions of (almost) full employment and thanks to a role more or less strongly regulatory of the state in the economy, **some limits to the natural violence of capitalist dynamics could be legally established.** The legal obligations that in certain periods have protected society from the violence of capital were always founded on the existence of a relation of force of a political and material kind (workers’ violence against the violence of capital). Thanks to political force it became possible to affirm rights, establish laws and protect them as personal rights. With the decline in the political force of the workers’ movement, the natural precariousness of labor relations in capitalism and its brutality have re-emerged. **The new phenomenon is not the precarious character of the job market, but the technical and cultural conditions in which info-labor is made precarious.** The technical conditions are those of digital recombination of info-work in networks. The cultural conditions are those of the education of the masses and the expectations of consumption inherited from late 20th century society andcontinuously fed by the entire apparatus of marketing and media communication. If we analyze the first aspect, i.e. the technical transformations introduced by the digitalization of the productive cycle, we see that **the essential point is** not the becoming precarious of the labor relation (which, after all, has always been precarious), but **the dissolution of the person as active productive agent, as labor power.** The cyberspace of global production can be described as an immense expanse of de-personalized human time. Info-labor, the provision of time for the elaboration and the recombination of segments of info-commodities, is the extreme point of arrival of the process of the abstraction from concrete activities that Marx analyzed as a tendency inscribed in the capital-labor relation. **The process of abstraction of labor has progressively stripped labor time of every concrete and individual particularity.** The atom of time of which Marx wrote is the minimal unit of productive labor. But **in industrial production, abstract labor time was impersonated by a physical and juridical bearer, embodied in a worker in flesh and bone,** with a certified and political identity. Naturally capital did not purchase a personal disposition, but the time for which the workers were its bearers. But **if capital wanted to dispose of the necessary time for its valorization, it was obliged to hire a human being, to buy all of its time, and** therefore it had to face up to **the material needs and to the social and political demands of which the human was a bearer. When we move onto the sphere of info-labor there is no longer a need to buy a person for eight hours a day indefinitely. Capital no longer recruits people, but buys packets of time, separated from their interchangeable and occasional bearers. De-personalized time has become the real agent of the process of valorisation, and de-personalized time neither has any right, nor any demand**. It can only be either available or unavailable, but the alternative is purely theoretical because the physical body, despite not being a legally recognized person, still has to buy his food and pay the rent. The informatic procedures of the recombination of semiotic material have the effect of liquefying the “objective” time necessary to produce the info-commodity. In all of the time of life the human machine is there, pulsating and available, like a brain-sprawl in waiting. The extension of time is meticulously cellularized: cells of productive time can be mobilized in punctual, casual and fragmentary forms. The recombination of these fragments is automatically realized in the network. The mobile phone is the tool that makes possible the connection between the needs of semiocapital and the mobilization of the living labor of cyberspace. The ring-tone of the mobile phone calls the workers to reconnect their abstract time to the reticular flux. Semiocapital puts neuro-psychic energies to work, and submits them to

machinic speed. It compels our cognition, our emotional hardware, to follow the rhythm of net-productivity. Cyberspace overloads cybertime, because cyberspace is an unbounded sphere, whose speed can accelerate without limits. But cybertime (the time of attention, memory, and imagination) cannot be speeded up beyond a limit. Otherwise it cracks. And it is actually cracking, collapsing under the stress of hyperproductivity. An epidemic of panic is spreading throughout the circuits of the social brain. An epidemic of

depression is following the outbreak of panic. The current crisis of the new economy has to be seen as a consequence of this nervous breakdown. Once upon a time Marx spoke about overproduction, meaning the excess of available goods that could not be absorbed by the social market. Nowadays it is the social brain that is assaulted by an overwhelming supply of attention-demanding goods. This is why the social factory has become the factory of unhappiness: the assembly line of net-production is directly exploiting the emotional energy of the virtual class. We are now beginning to become aware of it, so we are able to recognize ourselves as cognitarians. Flesh, body, desire, in permanent electrocution. It’s a strange word – “liberalism” – with which we identify the ideology prevalent in the posthuman transition to digital slavery. Liberty is its foundational myth, but the liberty of whom? The liberty of capital, certainly.

Capital must be absolutely free to expand in every corner of the world to find the fragment of human time available to be exploitated for the most miserable wage. But liberalism also predicates the liberty of the person. In neoliberal rhetoric, the juridical person is free to express oneself, to choose representatives, and be entrepreneurial at the level of politics and the economy. All this is very interesting, only that **the person has disappeared, what is left is like an inert object, irrelevant and useless. The person is free, sure. But his time is enslaved.** His liberty is a juridical fiction to which nothing in concrete daily life corresponds. If we consider the conditions in which thework of the majority of humanity, proletariat and cognitariat, is actually carried out in our time, **if we examine the conditions the average wage globally, if we consider the current cancellation of previous labor rights, we can say with no rhetorical exaggeration that we live in a regime of slavery. The average salary on the global level is hardly sufficient to buy the indispensable means for the mere survival of a person** whose time is at the service of capital. And **people do not have any right over the time of which they are formally the proprietors, but effectively expropriated. That time does not really belong to them, because it is separated from the social existence of the people who make it available to the recombinant cyberproductive circuit. The time of work is fractalized, that is, reduced to minimal fragments for reassembly, and the fractalization makes it possible for capital to constantly find the conditions of the minimum salary.** Precariousness is the black heart of the capitalist production process in the sphere of the global network in which circulates a continuous flow of fragmented and recomposable info-work. Precariousness is the transformative element of the whole cycle of production. Nobody is outside its reach. **The wages of the workers at unspecified times are struck, reduced, cut, and the life of all is threatened by precarization.** The digital info-work can be fragmented in order to be recomposed in a separate place from where that work is done. From the point of view of the valorization of capital, flow is continuous, but from the point of view of the existence and time lived by cognitive workers, **productive activity has a character of recombinant fragmentation in cellular form.** Pulsating cells of work are lit and extinguished in the large control board of global production. **Info-work is innately precarious, not because of the contingent viciousness of employers but for the simple reason that the allocation of work time can be disconnected from the individual and legal person of the worker,** an ocean of valorizing cells convened in a cellular way

and recombined by the subjectivity of capital. It is appropriate of reconceptualize the relationship between recombinant capital and immaterial labor, and it is advisable to obtain a new framework of reference. Given the impossibility, from now on, to reach a contractual elaboration of the cost of work by basing it on the legal person, owing to the

fact that the productive abstract labor is disconnected from the individual

person of the worker, the traditional form of the wage is put out of play since

it no longer guarantees anything anymore. Therefore, the recombinant character of cognitive labor seems incompatible with any possibility of social recomposition, and with a process of subjectivation. **The rules of negotiation, collaboration and conflict have changed, not because of a political decision, but because of a technical and cultural change in the labor relationship.** The rules are not immutable, and there is no rule which forces us to comply with the rules. The legalist left has never understood this. Fixed on the idea that it is necessary to comply with the rules, it has never known how to carry out confrontation on the new ground inaugurated by digital technologies and the globalization of the cycle of info-work. The neoliberals have understood this very well and they have subverted the rules that were laid down in a century of trade-union history. **In the classical mode of industrial production, the rule was based on a rigid relationship between work and capital, and on the possibility of determining the value of goods on the basis of socially necessary working time. But in the recombining stage capital based on exploitation of fluid info-work, there no longer exists any deterministic relations between work and value.** We should not aim to restore the rules that the neoliberal power has violated,we should invent new rules adequate to the fluid form of the labor-capital

relation, where there is no longer any quantitative time-value determinism and thus where there is no longer any necessary constant in the relationship

between economic sizes. How can we oppose the systemic de-personalization of the working class and the slavery that is affirmed as a mode of command of precarious and

depersonalized work? This is the question that is posed with insistence by whomever still has a sense of human dignity. Nevertheless, the answer does

not arrive because the form of resistance and struggle that were efficacious in the 20th century appear to no longer have the capacity to spread and

consolidate, nor consequently can they stop the absolutism of capital. We have learned from the experience of workers’ struggle in the last years that

the struggle of precarious workers does not become a cycle, does not leave a social sediment of consciousness, organization and solidarity. **Fractalized work can** also **punctually rebel, but this does not set into motion any wave of**

**struggle. The reason is easy to understand. In order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of the bodies of labor and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for the cellularized bodies to become a community. No wave can be created, because the workers do not share their existence in time, and behaviors can only become a wave when there is a continuous proximity in time that info-labor no longer allows.**

#### Thus the advocacy: We endorse radical passivity A process in which we withdraw our energies from the market, and stop investing in the technosphere of semiocapitalism. They want us to defend that “In a just government, workers ought to have the right to strike.” But we simply refuse to invest our social energies towards the topic, our refusal of the topic is a refusal to engage in the political, and economic sphere, the first step in the process of exhaustion.

#### Berardi defends and clarifies the advocacy.

​​(Franco ‘Bifo’ **Berardi 7** is a writer and theorist based in Bologna. His work revolves mainly around the aesthetics of the contemporary psychosphere. His latest books include Futurability, Phenomenology of the End, and The Soul at Work. In the 1970s he was one of the founders of the pirate radio station Radio Alice, the magazine A/traverso and of the political movement Autonomia,  “After the Future”, <https://libcom.org/files/AfterFuture.pdf>)

**The concept of exhaustion entered public discourse in the 1970s with the**

**publication of Limits to Growth, the Report of the Club of Rome:** Under the direction of a team of systems analysts based at Massachusetts Institute of Technology..., the report gave voice to the prevailing consensus that **Fordist manufacture had entered a period of irreversible decline.** But it also brought something palpably new to the analysis. If there was a crisis in the offing, it was not one that could be measured in conventional economic terms – a crisis in productivity or economic growth rates – but rather a wholesale crisis in the realm of reproduction. For the Club of Rome what was at stake was no less than the continuing reproduction of the earth’s biosphere and hence the future of life on earth. The most visible signs of the impending crisis were therefore to be found in the existence of all kind of ecological disequilibria, exhaustion, and breakdown, from rising levels of pollution to famine and the increase in extinction rates. (Cooper 2008: 15-16) The Report refers to the physical resources, not to the dangers of over-exploitation of the nervous energies of the social mind. But the Report cried havoc, because for the first time the intrinsic impossibility of unlimited growth was revealed. In her remarkable book, Melinda Cooper relates the concept of exhaustion to the biological field, and also to the field of mental energy. Cooper writes: **Twenty years later,** armed with more sophisticated modeling tools, the same team came up with a slightly more nuanced prognosis for the future. **Limits to growth, they** now **argued, were time-like rather than space-like.** This meant that **we might have already gone beyond the threshold at which an essential resource such as oil could be sustainably consumed,** long before we would notice its actual depletion. In fact, it was highly probable according to the report’s author, that we were already living beyond our limit, in a state of suspended crisis, innocently waiting for the future to boomerang back in our faces. Time is in fact the ultimate limit in the world’s model. (Cooper 2008: 16-17) **Time is in the mind. The essential limit to growth is the mental impossibility to enhance time** (Cybertime) beyond a certain level. I think that we are here touching upon a crucial point. The process of re-composition, of conscious and collective subjectivation, finds here a new – paradoxical – way. Modern **radical thought has always seen the process of subjectivation as an energetic process: mobilization, social desire and political activism, expression, participation have been the modes of conscious collective subjectivation in the age of the revolutions. But in our age energy is running out, and desire which has given soul to modern social dynamics is absorbed in the black hole of virtualization and financial games,** as Jean Baudrillard (1993a) argues in his book Symbolic Exchange and Death, first published in 1976. In this book Baudrillard analyzes the hyper-realistic stage of capitalism, and the instauration of the logic of simulation. Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography. From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death. But it is also, in a sense, reinforced through its own destruction. It

becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal. [...] The reality principle corresponds to a certain stage of the law of value. Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather that the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra. We must therefore reconstruct the entire genealogy of the law of value and its simulacra in order to grasp the hegemony and the enchantment of the current system. A structural revolution of value. This genealogy must cover political economy, where it will appear as a second-order simulacrum, just like all

those that stake everything on the real: the real of production, the real of signification, whether conscious or unconscious. Capital no longer belongs to the order of political economy: it operates with political economy as its simulated model. The entire apparatus of the commodity law of value is absorbed and recycled in the larger apparatus of the structural law of value, this becoming part of the third order of simulacra. Political economy is thus assured a second life, an eternity, within the confines of an apparatus in which it has lost all its strict determinacy, but maintains an effective presence as a system of reference for simulation. (Baudrillard 1993a: 2) **Simulation is the new plane of consistency of capitalist growth:** financial speculation, for instance, has displaced the process of exploitation from the sphere of material production to the sphere of expectations, desire, and immaterial labor. **The simulation process (Cyberspace) is proliferating without limits, irradiating signs that go everywhere in the attention market.** The brain is the market, in semiocapitalist hyper-reality. And the brain is not limitless, **the brain cannot expand and accelerate indefinitely.** The process of collective subjectivation (i.e. social recomposition) implies the development of a common language-affection which is essentially happening in the temporal dimension. **The semiocapitalist acceleration of time has destroyed the social possibility of sensitive elaboration of the semio-flow.** The proliferation of simulacra in the info-sphere has saturated the space of attention and imagination. Advertising and stimulated hyper-expression (“just do it”), have submitted the energies of the social psyche to permanent mobilization. Exhaustion follows, and **exhaustion is the only way of escape: Nothing, not even the system, can avoid the symbolic obligation, and it is in this trap that the only chance of a catastrophe for capital remains. The system turns on itself, as a scorpion does when encircled by the challenge of death.** For it is summoned to answer, if it is not to lose face, to what can only be death. The system must itself commit suicide in response to the multiplied challenge of death and suicide. So hostages are taken. On the symbolic or sacrificial plane, from which every moral consideration of the innocence of

the victims is ruled out the hostage is the substitute, the alter-ego of the terrorist, the hostage’s death for the terrorist. Hostage and terrorist may thereafter become confused in the same sacrificial act. (Baudrillard 1993a: 37) In these impressive pages Baudrillard outlines the end of the modern dialectics of revolution against power, of the labor movement against capitalist domination, and predicts the advent of a new form of action which will be marked by the sacrificial gift of death (and self-annihilation). After the destruction of the World Trade Center in the most important terrorist act ever, Baudrillard wrote a short text titled The Spirit of Terrorism where he goes back to his own predictions and recognizes the emergence of a catastrophic age. When the code becomes the enemy the only strategy can be catastrophic: all the counterphobic ravings about exorcizing evil: it is because it is there, everywhere, like an obscure object of desire. Without this deep-seated complicity, the event would not have had the resonance it has, and in their symbolic strategy the terrorists doubtless know that they can count on this unavowable complicity. (Baudrillard 2003: 6) This goes much further than hatred for the dominant global power by the disinherited and the exploited, those who fell on the wrong side of global order. This malignant desire is in the very heart of those who share this order’s benefits. An allergy to all definitive order, to all definitive power is happily

universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center embodied perfectly,

in their very double-ness (literally twin-ness), this definitive order: No need, then, for a death drive or a destructive instinct, or even for perverse, unintended effects. Very logically – inexorably the increase in the power heightens the will to destroy it. And it was party to its own destruction. When the two towers collapsed, you had the impression that they were responding to the suicide of the suicide-planes with their own suicides. It has been said that “Even God cannot declare war on Himself.” Well, He can. The West, in position of God (divine omnipotence and absolute moral legitimacy), has become suicidal, and declared war on itself. (Baudrillard 2003: 6-7) In Baudrillard’s catastrophic vision **I see a new way of thinking subjectivity: a reversal of the energetic subjectivation that animates the revolutionary theories of the 20th century, and the opening of an implosive theory of subversion, based on depression and exhaustion. In the activist view exhaustion is seen as the inability of the social body to escape the vicious destiny that capitalism has prepared: deactivation of the social energies that once upon a time animated democracy and political struggle. But exhaustion could also become the beginning of a slow movement towards a “wu wei” civilization, based on the withdrawal, and frugal expectations of life and consumption. Radicalism could abandon the mode of activism, and adopt the mode of passivity. A radical passivity would definitely threaten the ethos of relentless productivity that neoliberal politics has Imposed.** The mother of all the bubbles**, the work bubble, would finally deflate. We have been working too much** during the last three or four centuries, and outrageously too much during the last thirty years. The current depression

could be the beginning of a massive abandonment of competition, consumerist drive, and of dependence on work. Actually, if we think of the geopolitical struggle of the first decade – the struggle between Western domination and jihadist Islam – we recognize that the most powerful weapon has been suicide. 9/11 is the most impressive act of this suicidal war, but thousands of people have killed themselves in order to destroy American military hegemony. And they won, forcing the western world into the bunker of paranoid security, and defeating the hyper-technological armies of the West both in Iraq, and in Afghanistan. The suicidal implosion has not been confined to the Islamists. Suicide has became a form of political action everywhere. Against neoliberal politics, Indian farmers have killed themselves. Against exploitation hundreds of workers and employees have killed themselves in the French factories of

Peugeot, and in the offices of France Telecom. In Italy, when the 2009 recession destroyed one million jobs, many workers, haunted by the fear of unemployment, climbed on the roofs of the factories, threatening to kill themselves. Is it possible to divert this implosive trend from the direction of death, murder, and suicide, towards a new kind of autonomy, social creativity and of life? I think that it is possible only if we start from exhaustion, **if we emphasize the creative side of withdrawal. The exchange between life and money could be deserted, and exhaustion could give way to a huge wave of withdrawal from the sphere of economic exchange. A new refrain could emerge in that moment, and wipe out the law of economic growth.** The self-organization of the general intellect could abandon the law of accumulation and growth, and start a new concatenation, where collective intelligence is only subjected to the common good.

#### Radical Passivity refuses to invest energy into the future. Obsession with the future is rooted in a capitalist ideal of always producing more. The idea that the future will always be better because growth will just go up forever. We will always have more technology, and more stuff. But this idea is wrong unchecked growth forever is impossible.

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The rise of the **myth of the future is rooted in modern capitalism,** in the experience of expansion of the economy and knowledge. The idea that the future will be better than the present is **not a natural idea, but the imaginary effect of the peculiarity of the bourgeois production model.** Since its beginning, since the discovery of the new continent and the rewriting of the maps of the world, **modernity has been defined by an amplification of the very limits of the world,** and the peculiarity of capitalist economy resides exactly in the accumulation of the surplus value that results in the constant enhancement of the spheres of material goods and knowledge. **In the second part of the nineteenth century, and in the first part of the twentieth, the myth of the future reached its peak, becoming something more than an implicit belief: it was a true faith, based on the concept of "progress,"** the ideological translation of the reality of economic growth. Political action was reframed in the light of this faith in a progressive future. **Liberalism and social democracy, nationalism and communism, and anarchism itself, all the different families of modern political theory share a common certainty: notwithstanding the darkness of the present, the future will be bright.** In this book I will try to develop the idea that **the future is over.** As you know, this isn't a new idea. **Born with punk, the slow cancellation of the future got underway in the 1970s and 1980s. Now those bizarre predictions have become true.** The idea that the future has disappeared is, of course, rather whimsical-since, as I write these lines, the future hasn't stopped unfolding. But when I say "future," I am not referring to the direction of time. I am thinking, rather, of the psychological perception, which emerged in the cultural situation of progressive modernity, **the cultural expectations that were fabricated during the long period of modern civilization, reaching a peak in the years after the Second World War.** Those expectations **were shaped in the conceptual frameworks of an ever progressing development, albeit through different methodologies:** the HegeloMarxist mythology of Aujhebung and founding of the new totality of Communism; **the bourgeois mythology of a linear development of welfare and democracy; the technocratic mythology of the all-encompassing power of scientific knowledge; and so on.**

#### The topic’s call for unionization and strikes might have worked a century ago, but post digital infosphere they fail. The topic fails to understand which causes it to fail and is a bad starting point

**Berardi 9** [Franco Berardi, Italian communist theorist and activist in the autonomist tradition, whose work mainly focuses on the role of the media and information technology within post-industrial capitalism “Chapter 4 Exhastion and Subjectivity.” After the Future, by Franco Bifo Berardi et al., AK Press, 2011. P. 107-108 // LEX JB//JShin]

The financial cycle is bleeding the social environment dry: sucking energies, resources, and the future. And giving nothing back. Recovery of the financial process of valorization of capital is totally separated from the cycle of material production and social demand. Financial capitalism has obtained autonomy from social life. Let’s consider the political side of the same problem: once upon a time when society was suffering the blows of recession, workers reacted with strikes, struggle and political organization, and forced state intervention in order to increase demand. Industrial growth needed mass consumption and social stability. What is impressive in the ongoing crisis, on the contrary, is the widespread passivity of the workers, their inability to unionize. The political trend in Europe is the meltdown of leftist parties and the labor movement. In the US, Obama is daily attacked by racist and populist mobs, but no progressive social movement is emerging. 1.2 million people have had their mortgages foreclosed upon and lost their houses following the sub-prime swindle, but no organized reaction has surfaced. People suffer and cry alone. In the old time of industrial capitalism, the working class could fight against a target that was precisely identified: the boss, the entrepreneur who was the owner of material things like the factory, and of the product of his laborers. Nowadays the boss has vanished. He [they[ is fragmented into billions of financial segments, and disseminated into millions of financial agents scattered all around the world. The workers themselves are part of recombinant financial capital. They are expecting future revenues from their pension fund investments. They own stock options in the enterprise exploiting their labor. They are hooked up, like a fly in a spider web, and if they move, they get strangled, but if they don’t move, the spider will suck their life from them. Society may rot, fall apart, agonize. It is not going to affect the political and economic stability of capitalism. What is called economic recovery is a new round of social devastation. So the recession is over, capitalism is recovering. Nonetheless, unemployment is rising and misery is spreading. This means that financial capitalism is autonomous from society. Capitalism doesn’t need workers: it just needs cellular fractals of labor, underpaid, precarious, de-personalised. Fragments of impersonal nervous energy, recombined by the network. The crisis is going to push forward technological change, and the substitution of human labor with machines. The employment rate is not going to rise in the future, and productivity will increase. A shrinking number of workers will be forced to produce more and more, and to work overtime. The real bubble is the work bubble. We have been working too much; we are still working too much. The human race does not need more goods, it needs a redistribution of existing goods, an intelligent application of technology and a worldwide cut in the lifetime dedicated to labor. Social energies have to be freed from labor dependence, and returned to the field of social affection, education, and therapy. We should take seriously the concept of autonomy. In the present condition autonomy means exodus from the domain of economic law: Out-onomy, abandonment of the field of economic exchange, self-organization of knowledge and of production in a sphere of social life which is no longer dependent on economic culture and expectations – barter, free exchange of time and of competence, food self reliance, occupation of territories in the cities, organization of self-defense.