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The Technology of Uselessness

I am useless, but God loves me.

—Mike Kelley

The expectation that technology will one day exist as pure utility is an assumption that frequently surfaces in collective thought on the development of society and social relations. This prospect has typically suggested two opposite scenarios of the future. On one hand, there is the utopian millenium predicted by modern thinkers, who were guided by belief in progress; this concept slowly began to supplant belief in the

concept of providence during the 17th and 18th centuries. Both concepts were characterized by belief in the unilinear development of the human race, but providence was a force that was expected to result in spiritual, rather than in economic autonomy. The engine of providence was considered the guiding hand of God (which was later amputated and stitched to the cyborg of capitalism by Adam Smith). In Early Modernity, when belief in providence began giving way to belief in progress, intellectuals and scholars were debating whether the social utopia of the future should be based on spiritual or on secular principles. Philosophers searched for an independent force in the universe that could save the earthly population from its economic shortcomings and its spiritual privation. Thomas More constructed a rather dubious literary utopia that marked the beginning of the shift from God/Christ to science/technology as savior. From More's perspective, neither of the two choices seemed particularly satisfying. Given the choice between El Dorado and the regime of Mahomet the Prophet, Voltaire found the former more tolerable. This type of thought which valued secular human advancement and cast doubt on spiritual systems began to tip the scales of judgment in favor of science and technology, but certainly no celebration accompanied this shift. With the coming of the industrial revolution, the scales tipped decisively in favor of science and technology once and for all. At last, a foreseeable end was imagined to the problem of production—soon there would be enough goods for everyone, and with such surplus, competition over scarce goods would cease. The idea of progress began to flourish from this point on. Both the left (Condorcet and Saint-Simon) and the right (Comte and Spencer) shared an optimism about the future in spite of

the wildly divergent destinies predicted by each—for example, council socialism was anticipated by Saint-Simon, and the appearance of the bourgeois *Übermensch* was expected by Spencer.

Let us not forget Marx in this thumbnail sketch. Although Marx was not one to wax utopian very often, he did have his moments. Marx believed that the factory system would solve problems of production (i.e., scarcity); however, he foresaw a new problem, that of distribution. The crisis in distribution would in turn lead to revolution, by which means the victorious workers would restructure the exploitive routes of bourgeois distribution. Such speculation has continued to manifest itself even later, in utopian visions well exemplified by René Clair in the film *A Nous la Liberté*. The film depicts a time after the glorious revolution when the workers enjoy the fruits of zero work, and live only to celebrate, to drink, and to sing, while the machines work dutifully, producing the goods needed to carry this utopia into a shining future. One of the main currents in modern art (Futurism, Constructivism, and Bauhaus) illustrated this soon-to-come secular utopia. All the same, it would be quite unfair to hang the sometimes shameful optimism of the 20th century on Marx. Although he demonstrated how rationalized capitalist economy would end the problem of production, he also realized that people could not be satisfied by goods alone. Marx foresaw that in the epoch of capitalism, although production rates would rise, so would the degree of alienation from our own human nature, from economic process, from economic products, and from other social beings. In terms of individuals' psychic condition, things would not get better, but would grow tortuously worse. For Marx, once other variables

besides production were examined, unilinear social advancement was not to be found.

This brings us to the second scenario— the pessimists' dystopia. This point of view seems to gain new proponents with each new mechanized and/or electronic war. Yet even when the idea of progress was at its apex, before the military catastrophes of the 20th century, some critics of the idea were already predicting that human "advancement" would end in disaster. First and foremost was Ferdinand Tönnies, who argued that advanced technology would only serve to increase the complexity of the division of labor (society), which in turn would strip people of all the institutions that are the basis of human community (family, friendship, public space, etc). After World War I, Oswald Spengler was among the leaders of this line of thought. To his mind, advanced technology and sprawling cities were not indications of progress; rather, they were indicators of the final moments of civilization—one that has hit critical mass and is about to burn itself out. The great sociologist Pitirim Sorokin summed up this perspective in *The Crisis of Our Age* when he stated:

Neither happiness, nor safety and security, nor even material comfort has been realized. In few periods of human history have so many millions of persons been so unhappy, so insecure, so hungry and destitute, as at the present time, all the way from China to Western Europe.

Here then are the two sides, forever in opposition. Today the two antithetical opinions continue to manifest themselves throughout culture. Corporate futurologists sing the praises

Smart Rocks

This Smart Rock or Smart Bullet is the most fully developed technology for destroying missiles and warheads. Now the desire of the bourgeois to subordinate themselves to the useless has become visible.

From U.S. Government Call



KitchenAid Stand Mixer

For the bargain-hungry consumer, KitchenAid offers this tried and true stand mixer. Glossy green and conspicuous, this mixer is laden with many extra features. Choose from barely mixed to very mixed. Enjoy enriched consumer privation with KitchenAid. *From KitchenAid \$409.95*

Available to you due to the lack of competitors for Hegelian Mastery of the Globe.



Jen Air 156 Range

The Jen Air 156 Range offers you dozens of options that transcend human use. This debauchery of excess includes a down draft ventilator with a 450 cubic ft. per minute internal blower, halogen light, coil, radiant and solid elements, convection and thermal ovens, 3 different optional timers, and a versatile cook top system so you can design the style of cooking surface you want.

From Jen Air \$1299.95

ADI Space-based Laser

The center piece of Reagan's grand monument to the useless. Now you too can share in this maniacal form of excess.

From U.S. Government Call



of computerized information management, satellite communications, biotechnology, and cybernetics; such technological miracles, they assure us, will make life easier as new generations of technology are designed and produced to meet social and economic needs with ever-greater efficiency. On the other hand, the concerns of pessimists, neoluddites, retreatists, and technophobes ring out, warning that humanity will not control the machines, but that the machines will control humanity. In more fanciful (generally Hollywood) moments, the new dystopia is envisioned as a world where people are caught in the evil grip of a self-conscious intelligent machine, one that either forces them into slavery, or even worse, annihilates the human race.

These are the two most common narratives of social evolution in regard to technology. For the utopians, the goal of progress is similar to the vision of René Clair—technology should become a transparent backdrop that will liberate us from the forces of production, so that we might engage in free hedonistic pursuits. For the dystopians, technology represents a state apparatus that is out of control—the war machine has been turned on, no one knows how to turn it off, and it is running blindly toward the destruction of humanity.

Evidence can certainly be found to support both of these visions, but a third possibility exists, one that is seldom mentioned because it lacks the emotional intensity of the other two. To expand on the suggestion of Georges Bataille, could the end of technological progress be neither apocalypse nor utopia, but simply uselessness? Pure technology in this case would not be an active agent that benefits or hurts

mankind: it could not be, as it has no function. Pure technology, as opposed to pure utility, is never turned on; it just sits, existing in and of itself. Unlike the machines of the utopians and dystopians, not only is it free of humanity, it is free of its own machine function—it serves no practical purpose for anyone or anything.

Where are these machines? They are everywhere—in the home, in the workplace, and even in places that can only be imagined. So many people have become so invested in seeing technology as a manifestation of value or anti-value, that they have failed to see that much of technology does nothing at all.

Recently, there has been considerable fascination with the perception that most people cannot learn to operate their video tape decks. As one comedian put it, “I just bought a VCR for \$400, and can’t figure out how to work it. \$400 is just too much for a clock that only blinks 12:00.” This situation is certainly exaggerated, but there is an interesting point of truth in it. To program many of the functions on a VCR requires skills beyond those of the average consumer (the program manuals typically require reading skills beyond the level of a 6th grader, and extensive time is needed to learn some of the control functions). When video first hit the consumer markets, the belief was that everyone would soon have a TV studio in h/er house (along with a jet pack). The home TV studio would mark the end of progress in video production. Instead, VCRs filled with useless computer chips now gather cobwebs in home entertainment centers. For example, consider the existence of a chip which allows a VCR to be programmed for a month in advance; this is actually nothing more than an homage to

the useless. It simply exists in and of itself, having no real life function. Most programming information is not available a month in advance, and even if it were, why would someone need to tape a month's worth of television programs, and who would remember the appropriate times to insert new blank tapes?

Why such a chip was made in the first place falls into a web of possibility that is difficult to untangle. First, the perverse desires that consumers associate with utility should not be underestimated. Driven by spectacularized engines of desire, consumers want more for their money—even if what they get is something that will never be used. The corporate answer is to meet a cliché with a cliché: Give customers what they want. Consequently, the marketing departments of corporations, in their struggle for market share in the electronics industry, force their engineers and designers to create new products laden with extra features. One main selling point: Our machine has the most features for the money. The question for the consumer is: “Did I get a good deal [i.e., the most for the money]?” The question of “Can I actually use what I buy?” is never raised. The corporations know of the desire for the useless (a desire that can never be fulfilled), and comply by heaping on their products as much useless gadgetry as possible in order to seduce the bargain-hungry consumer. And so the cycle starts.

The cycle begins to spiral as new generations of technology are introduced—in this case depurified technology. The slogan of one electronics company—“so smart, it's simple”—is symbolic of depurification. The corporation is, in a sense, announcing that its technology actually has a use. Consumers can buy it not just for the sake of



Hospitech Magnetic Resonance Imaging Device

This state of the art medical technology delivers a corporate promise, since it is the perfect medical sight machine. The Hospitech MRI device articulates the space of the body with such clarity that there can be no place for a biological invader to hide. When used excessively the MRI protects capital and increases profit. *

From Hospitech \$299,999.95

**The MRI, like a luxury car, can only strive toward purity; it can never actually reach it. The MRI will always have the practical function of vision associated with it.*

Buick Park Avenue

This vehicle may be impure in its capacity as transportation, but we have loaded this car with numerous features that serve no purpose at all to make up for this oversight. At the heart of the Park



Avenue is a super fuel-injected V6 engine, revolutionary sonar suspension, standard anti-lock brakes, and a family-of-four air bag safety feature. Also included are 2-speed power windows, power locks, mirrors, antenna, ashtray and lighter, as well as climate control and a 6 speaker electronically tuned AM stereo/FM radio and cassette deck. This form of excess is the privilege of those who enjoy the surplus of production.

From Buick. \$25,000.95



Intercom Doorchime

The Intercom Doorchime is the first true opportunity to test the limits of uselessness. Although the bourgeoisie has never achieved the purity of uselessness of previous leisure classes, the Intercom Doorchime allows them to come very close. The doorchime consists of two pieces; a transmitter/doorbell unit and a receiver. Simply mount the doorbell unit by any door and carry the receiver with you everywhere you go in your house (use the handy belt clip). When a visitor rings the doorbell, your receiver chimes up to 150 ft. away, thus becoming an icon of secular transcendentalism, accumulating mana by controlling the lives of you and your family. From Intercom Inc \$89.95

having it, but because they will be able to make it do something. The slogan also signals that consumers are buying the *privilege* of being stupid (the ultimate commodity in the realm of conspicuous consumption). There will be no manuals to read, no assembly, no understanding required. The manual is the TV commercial for the product. Having seen it, consumers can make the product function.

While the buying patterns of those seduced by pure technology are guided by a perverse consumer activism, thoroughly corrupted by the Veblenesque nightmare of conspicuous consumption, the patterns of those buying impure technology are guided by a need to keep the apparatus of use as invisible as possible, so as not to interrupt the trajectory of one's "lifestyle." This attempt to return to impure technology eventually backfires, and the spiral becomes a circle again. The consumer zeal for simple technology that will not distract from daily tasks is too easily rechanneled into specialized products that rarely deliver the convenience that is so desperately sought. Two types of products emerge from this variety of artificially generated desire. First there is the product that is a con, such as an electric martini shaker. This is one case where the old fashioned way works just as well if not better. The second type is exemplified by a consumer-grade pasta making machine. One evening at home with this gizmo will quickly teach a person the meaning of labor intensification. This is not a technology of convenience. Either way, these pieces of bourgeois wonder will take their rightful place in upper cabinets and in closets as useless pieces of bric-a-brac that did not even serve the function of delivering enriched consumer privation. Unlike the VCR

chip, these pieces of technology require human contact before they achieve purity.

In all cases, the desire that consumer economy (the economy of surplus) has most successfully tapped is the need for excess, that is, the need to have so much that it is beyond human use. Pleasure is derived through negation—by *not* using a product. This form of excess is the privilege of those who enjoy the surplus of production. Although the bourgeoisie has never achieved the purity of uselessness of previous leisure classes, they still aspire with great fear, and with very little success, to total counterproduction. This class typically falls short of the upper level of the hierarchy of master and slave so aptly articulated by Hegel. The products which members of this class consume transform themselves into stand-ins for the obscene debauchery of excess, in which they as chieftains should personally participate. The cowardice of the bourgeoisie can never be underestimated. Confronted with the opportunity to test the limits of the possible, they instead let things take their place in the realm of the useless. Within this realm, the products of counterproduction acquire a being analogous to that of the sacred in “primitive” cultures, and become the icons of secular transcendentalism, accumulating mana by controlling the lives of those around them.

The uncanny notion that technology which is out of sight and out of mind best defines human existence within the economy of desire is one that is typically resisted by commonsense thought. As William James and Alfred Schutz proposed in their own unique ways, the principle of practicality structures everyday life. Objects are perceived first and foremost in terms of their instrumental value. In constructing a

model of individual existence centered around perception, there can be little doubt that the visible will be at the center and the invisible at the margins. Within the middle ground, utility is the primary governing factor. Hence, within this visible realm, the consumption of excess and excess consumption maintain an element of practicality. For example, a wealthy person buys a luxury car. Although it may have many useless elements, the main reason for its purchase is that it is a “nice ride.” The modifying adjective “nice” refers to its useless components, while the center component, the noun “ride,” refers to the product’s function. The potential for the car to make an instrumental process pleasurable is what relegates it to the realm of desire and excess, and therefore makes it suitable as a product for conspicuous consumption.

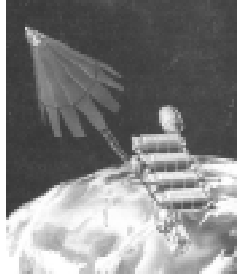
Another example is the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) device. In many cases, the way this diagnostic tool is used in medical institutions may actually be abuse. The MRI is a very expensive piece of state-of-the-art med-tech, so it is an investment that must be used to recoup the initial capital expenditure. The MRI can deliver on its corporate promise, as it is the perfect medical sight machine. In a manner far beyond any of its predecessors, the MRI can articulate the space of the body with such clarity that there can be no place for a biological body invader to hide. However, in many cases, the MRI is not needed. An X-ray is often all that is required to diagnose an illness. Excess enters this equation when the MRI is used abusively on the part of the doctor (simply as means to increase profit or to protect capital). Much the same can be said even when the machine is used as an extra precaution by the doctor or the patient. In any case, the MRI, like the luxury car, can only

100 KW Nuclear Power Source

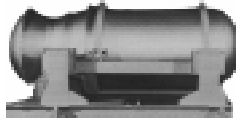
A limiting factor in any space-based anti-missile system is a continuous supply of electrical power to operate the system. The Defense Department, NASA, and the Department of Energy are working on a 100-kilowatt nuclear power source. Purchase one in advance and become part of a national monument to uselessness.*

From U.S. Government. call

**The fragments of Star Wars technology have not been released in pure form from the experimental labs yet. An enemy no longer exists. This American system has achieved utter transcendental uselessness.*



W-53 Thermonuclear Warhead



Proper adherence to the codes of uselessness can get you access to the W-53 thermonuclear warhead, weighing in at 8,300 lbs and a yield of 9 megatons.

As a special Bonus Offer, with every purchase of a W-53



you can get a **W-80 Warhead**

for half price! *From U.S. Government Call*

Don't fall asleep at the wheel of advanced technology.

Long hours on the road and late-night driving can cause drivers to lose concentration and feel drowsy. The Doze Alarm keeps you awake and alert. This simple, compact device fits comfortably over your ear and emits an audible alarm if your head drops forward as you drive. Requires one button cell battery (included).

From Doze Inc \$22.95

All items are guaranteed useless or your money back. Please be aware objects are perceived first and foremost in terms of their instrumental value. In constructing a model of individual existence centered around perception, there can be little doubt that the visible will be at the center and the invisible at the margins. Within the middle ground, utility is the primary governing factor. Hence within the visible realm, the consumption of excess and excess consumption maintains an element of practicality. Some items featured may require human contact before achieving purity. Prices do not include delivery, unless specified.



Shiatsu Massager

Our most popular massager. Powerful spheres provide the increased alienation that Marx foresaw in the epoch of capitalism. Feels like real hands.

From Homedics \$89.95

strive toward purity; it will never actually reach it. The MRI will always have the practical function of vision associated with it. Unlike these aforementioned examples, the useless is rarely noticed, because it is not a part of limited bourgeois excess. As consumers, we are not trained to witness uselessness or consciously value it—its psychic roots are buried much deeper in consciousness and in the economy.

Too often, excessive luxury in the center realm of the visible is mistaken for the limits of excess, but the limits of excess go far beyond the visible. To comprehend extreme excess, one must go beyond conspicuous consumption. Excess will never be seen, only imagined, and within this ideal space the margins can at least be understood. Whether it is a useless chip in the bowels of a machine, the technology that lives in people's closets, or an underground missile system, the purity of uselessness, the limits of excess, are not visible. The real deployment of power flows in absence, in the uncanny, nonrational margins of existence.

Sacrifices beyond the boundary between the visible and the invisible occasionally surface in everyday life. We all know that many people die on the roads and highways of the US every year (approximately 50,000 per year). These people are willingly and uselessly sacrificed to show the sincerity of our desire for transportation technology. No means to end this sacrifice exists, short of closing the roads, and yet no honor is paid to those who give their life for the excess of travel—it remains forever hidden. Philosopher and artist Gregory Ulmer proposed that an addendum be made to the Viet Nam war memorial in which the names of those killed on the highway would be spooled off on a printer beside the monument. Needless to say this monument was rejected,

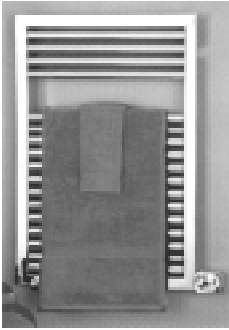
since such sacrifice and excess must remain hidden in modern societies. To monumentalize death and uselessness is simply too frightening.

Monuments to the sacrifices of the state are typical, but are only the beginning. Most of these monuments are abstracted bits of concrete, marble, bronze, or some other material that will signify the longevity of artificially created memory. But there are times when these monuments are brutally honest, and useless technology along with its slaves is put on public display. The *USS Arizona*, for example—a half sunken ship with the ship's full complement of corpses (officers included) rests silently in Pearl Harbor. This national monument, a functional item made useless through sacrifice, suggests the metaphysical moment of profound loss through its lack of function. (Woe to anyone who does not treat this sacred relic with proper respect, for it speaks of the will to excess, which is grounded in human uselessness in the face of death). But what is even more compelling about this monument is that the ship is carried on the active duty roster. This necropolis is more a symbol of the absent core of the war machine than a monument to the US soldiers who died in the battle of Pearl Harbor; it monumentalizes transcendental uselessness.

Utopian technology is that technology which has fallen from grace. It has been stripped of its purity and reendowed with utility. The fall is necessitated by a return to contact with humanity. Having once left the production table, the technology that lives the godly life of state-of-the-art uselessness has no further interaction with humans as users or as inventors; rather, humans serve only as a means to maintain its uselessness. The location of the most complex pure tech-

nology is no mystery. Deep in the core of the war machine is the missile system. Ultimately, all research is centered around this invisible monument to uselessness. The bigger and more powerful it becomes, the greater its value. But should it ever be touched by utility—that is, should it ever be used—its value becomes naught. To be of value, it must be maintained, upgraded, and expanded, but it must never actually do anything. This idol of destruction is forever hungry, and is willing to eat all resources. In return, however, it excretes objects of utility. Consumer communications and transportation systems, for example, have dramatically improved due to the continuous research aimed at increasing the grandeur of the apparatus of uselessness.

There can be a stopping point to this process—a discovery made by the collapsing Soviet Union. For all the “patriots of democracy” who gave a collective sigh of relief and boasted that they were at last proven right—“communism doesn’t work”—there still may be a need to worry. The fall of the USSR had little to do with ideology. The US and USSR were competitors in producing the best apparatus of uselessness in order to prove their own respective Hegelian mastery of the globe. Modern autocrats and oligarchs have long known that a standing army puts an undue strain on the economy. To be sure, standing armies were early monuments to uselessness, but in terms of both size and cost, they are dwarfed by the standing missile system of the electronic age. As with all things that are useless, there will be no return on the investment in it. The useless represents a 100% loss of capital. Although such investment seems to go against the utilitarian grain of visible bourgeois culture, whether in socialist or in constitutional republics, the



EMR 750 Towel Warmer

Everyone needs to be pampered with a toasty towel on a cold morning. Maybe the technology that created the electric EMR 750 won't liberate us from the forces of production, but then again maybe it will – you decide! Choose a chrome or gold-plated finish, or any custom color that coordinates with your bath.

From Myson Inc \$149.95



Sony Hi-Fi Stereo VCR With VCR Plus Programming

Driven by spectacularized engines of desire, consumers want more for their money even if they can't use what they get! SONY corporations delivers with a hi-fi stereo VCR with VCR plus programming, cable mouse, cable box controller, 181 channel capability, 8 event/1 month timer. The shuttle handles 13 essential functions and there's even a jog shuttle TV/VCR remote.*

From Sony \$499.95

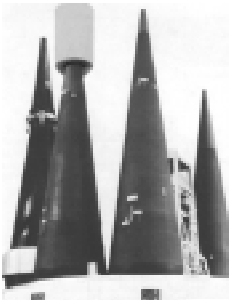
*Programming manual requires reading skills beyond 6th grade.



Farberware Electric Peeler

The Electric Peeler from Farberware provides the convenience that most consumers desperately desire. But before you know it, this device will be collecting dust in a closet or cabinet along with your home pasta maker and electric swizzle stick,

thus becoming another piece of useless technology. Comes with a built-in potato eye remover, 6 ft. cord, low voltage adapter, removable stainless steel blade. Adjustable for right or left hand use. From Farberware \$34.95



MK 21 Advanced Ballistic Missile Reentry Vehicles

The combined weight of 10 MK 21's is such that the plan to deploy that number on each MX not only would have reduced the missile's anticipated range by 600 miles, but also would have violated SALT II by exceeding the treaty's maximum allowable throw weight! This idol of destruction is forever hungry, and is willing to eat all resources. At a cost of \$1.752 million each, these useless missiles helped send the USSR into a state of bankruptcy. After all, the fall of the USSR had little to do with ideology.

From U.S. Government \$1,752,000.00

compulsive desire for a useless master is much greater (Japan is an interesting exception to this rule). Unfortunately for the USSR, they were unable to indulge in pure excess expenditure at the same rate as the US. The soviet techno-idol was a little more constipated, and could not maintain the needed rate of excretion. Consequently, once the limits of uselessness were reached, that system imploded.

The US government, on the other hand, has to this day remained convinced that further progress can be made. Reagan and his Star Wars campaign issued a policy radically expanding the useless. Reagan, of course, was the perfect one to make the policy, since he was an idol to uselessness himself. He represents one of the few times that uselessness has taken an organic form in this century. (This is part of the reason he was considered such a bourgeois hero. He was willing to personally plunge into uselessness without apology. He did not let a thing stand in for him). Playing on yuppie paranoia (the fascists' friend), Reagan convinced the public loyal to him that a defensive monument (Star Wars) to uselessness was needed, just in case the offensive monument (the missile system) was not enough. He was successful enough in his plea to guarantee that years of useless research will ensue that no one will be able to stop, even if his original monumental vision (a net of laser armed satellites) should be erased. In this manner, Reagan made sure that the apparatus of uselessness would expand even if the Cold War ended.

Indeed, this situation has come to pass. Currently, the US has no competitors in the race to uselessness, but the monument continues to be maintained and even to grow, which is particularly odd, since even the cynical argument

of deterrence is now moot. Even though the offensive monument to uselessness seems to be shrinking—missiles are being defused and cut apart with the care and order of high ritual, and technology costing millions of dollars is being laid to rest, having never done anything but exist—thanks to Reagan’s farsightedness, the general system continues to expand. Although many are still in denial, the desire of the bourgeois to subordinate themselves to the useless has become, for the moment, glaringly visible. The research is done; the system is upgraded, but for what reason? The missiles are now aimed at the ocean, so that even if they are “used,” they will still be useless. The fragments of Star Wars technology have not been released in pure form from the experimental labs, and even if they were, no enemy exists against which Star Wars technology would protect US citizens. The American system has achieved utter transcendental uselessness. This techno-historical moment is the highest manifestation of technological purity.

In his rush to save the apparatus of the useless from stalling, Reagan may have made one error. When he put the idea of the defensive monument in the minds of Americans, he disrupted the primary sign of the war machine—mutually assured destruction. He restored hope in American consciousness that perhaps utility could save US citizens from the total annihilation certain to destroy the rest of the world. The disassociation of death and uselessness took previously sacred elements of war-tech out of the privileged realm. When these elements became depurified, their value in terms of the satisfaction of bourgeois desire plummeted. This is partly why Reagan’s original Star Wars vision has been dismantled.

Thus far, however, most war-tech has not been depurified due to this ideological slippage, and the purity of offensive weapons of mass destruction continues to be enforced. Nations that do not understand the code of uselessness but that have state-of-the-art military technology are a cause for great concern. Iraq, Libya, and North Korea are all good examples. The US government is willing to take hostile action based merely on the belief that North Korea and Libya might get weapons of mass destruction and actually use them. In the case of Iraq, the code was actually broken when that government used chemical weapons. Iraq has not done well economically or militarily since that time. The lesson to be learned is that nations that do not subordinate themselves to the bourgeois idols of uselessness will be sacrificed as heretics, and will be denied access to the icons of uselessness.

In spite of the common wisdom of using the variables of national interest and utility to explain the relationship between desire and power, it is just as fruitful to do so using the principles of the anti-economy—perversity and uselessness. The economy of unchanneled desire and perversity, as suggested by Bataille, penetrates the surface of utility in a most convincing way. Progress in the 20th century has primarily consisted of bourgeois culture looking for a new master. In the time of bourgeois revolution, the aristocracy was destroyed, as was the church with its spiritual hierarchies, but the primordial desire to serve the useless has never been affected. The “primitive” ritual of offering goods to an angry or potentially angry God in order to appease it into a state of neutrality continues to replay itself in complex capitalist economy. All things must be subordinated to neutrality—to uselessness. One major difference

between the age of the virtual and more primitive times is that the contemporary idols have no metaphysical referent. The ones that have been constructed are not the mediating points between person and spirit, or life and afterlife; rather, they are end-points, empty signs. To this paper master, sacrifice has no limit. The stairs of the temple flow with blood every day. How fitting for progress to come to this end in the empire of the useless. As this mythic narrative continues to play itself out, the suggestion of Arthur and Marilouise Kroker begins to make more and more sense. We are not witnessing the decline of late capital, but instead, its recline into its own delirious death trance.