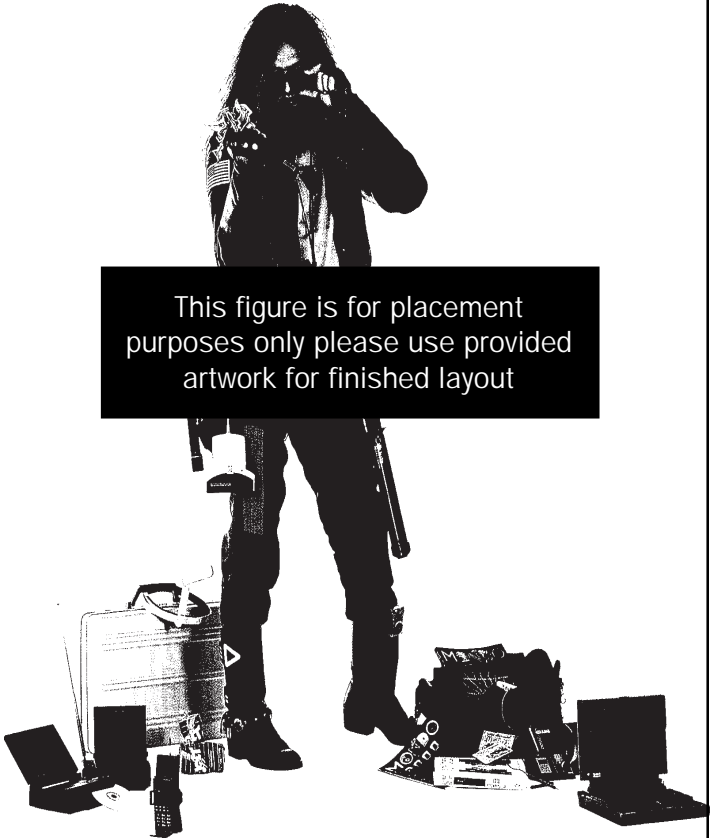


I bought my identity,
and so can you.

This figure is for placement
purposes only please use provided
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7

Paradoxes and Contradictions

No matter which side of the political spectrum is examined, a generalized consensus exists on the role of the individual in the formation of society, although it is phrased oppositely by each side. According to the political right, the individual must surrender h/er sovereignty to state power. From the point of view of the left, the individual must submit to enriched repression. In each case the individual loss of sovereignty is crucial. The authoritarians regard this loss as positive—the beneficent state provides the individual with security and order in exchange for h/er obedience, while radical elements see this loss as negative, since the individual is forced to live an alienating existence of fragmented consciousness. Consequently the differences between the two stem from their opposite interpretations of this act of

surrender. To determine where contingent elements fall along the political continuum, one must examine the degree to which the individual is deprived of h/er personal volition and desire. Unfortunately, no presocial moment free of state power ever existed outside the imagination, so no experiential knowledge can be used to identify or to measure the qualities of liberty. For this reason, certain arbitrary assumptions must be made to fix the location of liberty anywhere on the continuum between the noble savage and the war of all against all. This either/or decision cannot be reasoned without logical error (Goedel's paradox), nor is there a history (other than *state* history) from which to make an inductive judgment. One must just decide, or act in an ad hoc or random fashion. The decision to follow any certain idea is itself a wager.

Throughout this book, the assumption is that extraction of power from the individual by the state is to be resisted. Resistance itself is the action which recovers or expands individual sovereignty, or conversely, it is those actions which weaken the state. Therefore, resistance can be viewed as a matter of degree; a total system crash is not the only option, nor may it even be a viable one. This is not to soften the argument by opening the door a crack for liberal reform, since that means relinquishing sovereignty in the name of social justice, rather than for the sake of social order. Liberal action is too often a matter of equal repression for all, in order to resist the conservative practice of repression for the marginalized and modest liberty for the privileged. Under the liberal rubric, the people united will always be defeated. The practice being advocated here is to recover what the state has taken, as well as what the reformers have so generously given (and are continuing to give).

The issue of sovereignty brings up the first contradiction to be faced here. Throughout this work, two seemingly exclusive points have been voiced: While the current situation is partly defined by information overload, it is also defined by insufficient access to information. How can it be both ways? This is a problem of absence and presence—the presence of an overload of information in the form of spectacle (presence) that steals sovereignty, and an absence of information that returns sovereignty to the individual. To be sure, information on good consumerism and government ideology is abundant. Data banks are filled with useless facts, but how can access be gained to information that directly affects everyday life? An individual's data body is completely out of h/er control. Information on spending patterns, political associations, credit histories, bank records, education, lifestyles, and so on is collected and cross-referenced by political-economic institutions, to control our own destinies, desires, and needs. This information cannot be accessed, nor can we really know which institutions have it, nor can we be sure how it is being used (although it is safe to assume that it is not for benevolent purposes). This is strategic data that must be claimed. We should be protected from the creation of electronic doubles by the right to privacy, but we are not. The right to privacy is yet another welfare state illusion in the service of the economy of desire. Specific facts about the policies and laws that promote information-gathering are not readily available, since such facts are carefully guarded by legions of bureaucrats. One needs extensive special training just to research such problems, when this knowledge could be readily available. Finally, where is the network that allows problems to be voiced on a mass scale? It does not exist.

This is a peculiar case of censorship. Rather than stopping the flow of information, far more is generated than can be digested. The strategy is to classify or privatize all information that could be used by the individual for self-empowerment, and to bury the useful information under the reams of useless junk data offered to the public. Instead of the traditional information blackout, we face an information blizzard—a whiteout. This forces the individual to depend on an authority to help prioritize the information to be selected. This is the foundation for the information catastrophe, an endless recycling of sovereignty back to the state under the pretense of informational freedom.

Dilemmas involved in the decentralization of hardware are also worth consideration. Where does Luddite technophobia stop and retrograde techno-dependence begin? This is very much a problem of finding the ever-elusive golden mean. Decentralization of the hardware invites the hazard of a techno-addiction that benefits only the merchants of technology, while centralization guarantees that electronic manipulation of individuals at both the macro and micro levels will proceed uncontested in any significant way. While the utopian claims made by the developers and distributors of new technology seem woefully transparent (after all, they are the ones who benefit the most economically), those claims are, at the same time, very seductive. The chance to be freed from the algorithms of everyday life in order to concentrate on the metaphysics of ideas is a wish worth entertaining, and has very often been vital to modern utopian theory; yet there are very discomfoting elements in this vision. The economic prospects for creating such an environment are extremely bleak. If the technology were

cheap enough to construct (less than labor costs), what would happen to those in the labor force? They might have plenty of free time, but no way to support themselves. To indulge the assumption that the future will be similar to the past suggests they would not fare well, since they would become an excess population. At best there would be a completely homogenized labor force, with the service sector and manufacturing sector sharing the same squalor. This scenario seems to be a return to classical Marxism in which a process of pauperization leads to two homogenized classes, with the bottom class unable to purchase the goods manufactured. The system crashes? Who can say; yet it does seem reasonable to assume that technology will not provide the utopia that corporate futurologists predict. Such predictions seem to function more in the short term, to convince people to buy technology that they do not really need, as well as to prepare future markets.

Continued reflection on the more intelligible short-term prospects of the technology of desire makes it easier to see what is immediately bothersome about technocratic promises. Take the notion of the smart house. It sounds seductive. Here is a home that runs as efficiently as its construction allows. The computer monitors household activity, and acts in accordance with these activity patterns. Energy is never wasted; it is deployed only when and where it is needed. Security systems monitor the perimeter, to alert the authorities if the property is threatened. The home is efficient and secure; it is the manifestation of bourgeois value itself. But what is surrendered when all household activities are monitored and recorded? We know that if information can enter the house, it can also leave the house, so that the price of bourgeois utopia is privacy itself. With such data available,

ways for outside forces to control the household more efficiently will also develop. Due to its surveillance components, this type of technology is another contractual trade of sovereignty for order. What is suspect about this technoworld is that it values consumer passivity and technological mediation in the most totalizing sense.

This problem conjures the image of decentralization gone awry. Decentralization does not always favor resistant action; it can have a state function. For instance, it may be feasible for the corporate grid to provide most of the population with affordable smart machines as a marketing strategy. The more technology available to people, and the more it can insinuate itself into the algorithms of everyday life, the greater the chance that it will become a market of dependency. Addiction mania and hyperconsumerism are the basis for market maintenance and expansion. The addict always needs more. This is in part why there are such strong punishments for addictions that do not feed corporate bank accounts. It is intolerable to allow potential consumer populations to focus singularly on addictions of pleasure (food, sex, drugs). The empassioned consumer becomes inert, rather than wandering the grid of enriched privation. The inert consumer represents only one market of fixed consumption—for example, a singular desire for heroin. This kind of market is antithetical to one that remains in flux, oscillating between accumulation and obsolescence. The market of flux is one of entwinement—one product inevitably leads to another, necessitating constant upgrades and accessory purchases. One product line is interdependent with other product lines, and hence consumption and accumulation never stop. The final goal is a diversified

addiction, as opposed to one that monopolizes its consumers.

This discussion has not come full circle as it might seem at first glance. It has not gone from an apology for technology to an attack upon it. Rather, the problem being investigated is: How can technological decentralization return sovereignty to the individual rather than taking it away? Much of the answer lies in whether the technology is accepted as a means of passive consumption or as a means for active production. Passive addiction mania must be resisted; when corporate technocrats offer products or systems that seem to ride on the promises of a utopian dawn, one should scrutinize these offerings with the utmost suspicion. That which functions only "to make life easier (it all happens with the touch of a button)" is generally unnecessary. In the smart house, the computerized kitchen offers a data base on the recipes of the world. This is probably a con. Is a kitchen computer terminal really necessary? Does the service require a subscription? How often would it be used? Is it desirable to have information on daily life (cooking in this case) floating around the electronic net? Would it not be more efficient, cheaper, and private to simply purchase some cookbooks? This last question is very telling. When technology is trying to replace something that is not obsolete, one can be fairly certain that a strategy of dependence is at work. Further, continue using any technology that confounds the surveillance tactics of political economy. (In this case it is as simple as supporting book technology). Avoid using any technology that records data facts unless it is essential. For example, try not to use credit cards. An electronic record of a consumer's purchases is very precious data to the institutions of political economy. Do not let these institutions have it.

The technological artifacts and systems worthy of support are geared more toward sending out information, rather than receiving it. Desktop publishing technology is an excellent example of a system in the process of decentralization, one designed to foster active production rather than passive reception. When the technology is skewed toward reception, avoid it. (It should be noted that the strategy of entwinement is always a problem regardless of the technology chosen. Barring the total rejection of technology, the power of addiction will always be present). In the case of interactive technology, it is wise to ask, is it centralized or decentralized? If it is like the phone, and allows access to people and the information of your choice, use it—but always remember that the electronic tape could be recording. If it is centralized and spectacular, it is better to avoid it. The ability to choose an ending for a network TV show is not interaction; it is a device to keep the viewer watching. In this case, all the inventive choices have already been made. This is an example of a device designed to keep the viewer passively engaged.

To help direct technology toward increased individual autonomy, hackers ought to continue developing personal hardware and software; however, since most technology emerges from the military complex and the rest comes from the corporate world, the situation is rather bleak.

Although much of the hope for continued resistance in the technoworld rests with hackers, a contingent of resistant technocrats guided by the concerns of the radical left has yet to emerge. As mentioned in a previous chapter, this group is generally very apolitical. While they must be credited for liberating the hardware and software that represent the first moments

of sovereignty in techno-culture, thereby lifting the techno-situation out of hopelessness, care must be taken not to over-valorize them. Their motivations for producing technology oscillate between compulsion and ethical imperative. It is a type of addiction mania that carries its own peculiar contradictions. Since such production is extremely labor-intensive, requiring permanent focus, a specialized fixation emerges that is beneficial within the immediate realm of techno-production, but is extremely questionable outside its spatial-temporal zone. The hacker is generally obsessed with efficiency and order. In producing decentralized technology, a fetish for the algorithmic is understandable and even laudable; however, when it approaches a totalizing aesthetic, it has the potential to become damaging to the point of complicity with the state. As an aesthetic, rather than a means of production, it can be a reflection of the obscenity of bourgeois capitalism. Efficiency alone cannot be the measure of value. This is one demand that the contestational voice has been making for two centuries. The aesthetic of efficiency is one of exclusion; it seeks to eliminate its predecessors. Since perfect efficiency is not attainable, and it has yet to be shown how an ascendant system can incorporate all of the usefulness of past systems, obscene sacrifice becomes an ever-present companion. Not only does excess efficiency sacrifice elements of understanding and explanation, but it also subtracts from humanity itself. Ideas, art, and passion can thrive as well, if not better, in an environment of disorder. The aesthetics of inefficiency, of desperate gambles, of incommensurable imaginings, of insufferable interruptions, are all a part of individual sovereignty. These are situations in which invention occurs.

Here one stumbles upon the paradox of hacking: If hackers must singularly commit to algorithmic thinking to be productive, can this technocratic class be convinced to act in a manner that, at times, will be antithetical to such thinking? Perhaps the more utopian results of hacking—the decentralization of hardware and information—are in fact merely contingent elements in hacker discourse. What then is to be done? If the hackers are dissuaded from focusing on the aesthetics of efficiency, and thereby politicized, production could go down; this could in turn restrict the availability of decentralized hardware and software needed by the contestational voice. If the hackers remain focused on efficiency, that is more likely to strengthen the totalizing operations of bourgeois discourse. Treating this problem is partly a matter of redeployment. The hacker occupies a very specialized time zone, and is involved in specialized labor. Anti-company technocrats must be persuaded, by whatever available means, to enter other time zones and address the particular situations found there. Relocating hackers in other time zones should not be understood literally; instead it should lead to recombinant collaboration. That is, the characteristics of the hacker and the cultural worker should blend and thereby form a link between time zones, opening the possibilities for discourse and action across the social time continuum.

It is quite likely that decentralizing hardware (technocratic resistance) and redistributing labor (worker resistance) are not enough in themselves to intersect time zones. As already indicated, without frames of interpretation to encourage the individual's capacity for autonomous action, decentralization and redistribution could well have the opposite effect—i.e., addiction mania. The best chance to keep

interpretation of cultural phenomena fluid lies in manipulating, recombining, and recontextualizing signs; when accompanied by other types of resistance, this allows the maximum degree of autonomy. Sign manipulation with the purpose of keeping the interpretive field open is the primary critical function of the cultural worker. This function separates the cultural worker from the propagandist, whose task it is to stop interpretation, and to rigidify the readings of the culture-text. The cultural worker's secondary function is to cross-fertilize separate time and/or spatial sectors, but this task has met with less success (the problem of over-deployment). The cultural worker is obligated to ferret out the signs of freedom in as many sectors as possible, and transport them by way of image/text to other locations. This transference constitutes the temporary anti-spectacle. For example, hackers have always said that the computer can grant the individual the ability to understand and to use real power. Whatever the agent commands, the computer will do. Although this may seem to be a statement of the obvious, it is questionable whether the meaning of this observation is really recognized outside the technocratic sector. If this assertion is truly understood, the possibilities for resistance dramatically increase. Populist strategies of resistance derived from reactions to the problems of early capital are only an option.

Consider the following: an activist organization decides that insurance agencies which keep records about uninsured HIV+ people contribute to discriminatory practices, and that such information-gathering must be stopped. This is not a problem of early capital imperialism, but one of late capital information codes. All the picket lines, affinity groups, and drum corps that can be mustered will have little

effect in this situation. The information will not be deleted from the data banks. But to covertly spoil the information banks, or destroy them, would have the desired effect. This is a matter of meeting information authority with information disturbance; it is direct autonomous action, suitable to the situation. One electronic affinity group could do instantly what the many could not over time. This is postmodern civil disobedience: it requires democratic interpretation of a problem, but without large-scale action. In early capital, the only power base for marginal groups was defined by their numbers. This is no longer true. Now there is a technological power base, and it is up to cultural and political activists to think it through. As time fragments, populist movements and specialized forces can work successfully in tandem. It is a matter of choosing the strategy that best fits the situation, and of keeping the techniques of resistance open.

Although breaks in communication lines within and between authoritarian institutions are reasonable focal points for resistance, and it is even possible that the concrete shell of some institutions could be completely crashed, it will still be difficult, if not impossible, to erase all the traces of the institution left in the rubble. Institutions, like ideas, do not die easily. In fact, how could complex society exist without bureaucracies? How would communication exist without language? Irredeemable power is ongoing. Macro institutions have autonomous existence, independent of individual action. So what is the point of resistance—why attack that which is undefeatable? Herein lies the problem of agency. To what degree does freedom exist for the individual? This is a site of continuous turmoil with no satisfactory answer. Over the past century, ideas on the degree of entrapment

have wildly proliferated. People are caught in the routinized pathways of work, and are slaves to the demands of production; people are caught in the iron cage of bureaucracy, and are slaves to the process of rationalization; people are caught in the domain of the code, and are slaves to the empire of signs. So much is immediately taken, from the moment the individual is thrown into the world. Even so, it is a worthy wager to assume that the individual possesses a degree of autonomy valuable enough to defend, and that it is possible to expand it. It is also reasonable to gamble that social aggregates similar in philosophical consensus can reconfigure social structures.

Of these two wagers, the former is of the most immediate concern. As the division of labor grows in complexity, individual sovereignty fades under increasing erasure, becoming a transparent transistor for social currents. Agency dwindles down to mundane choices entrapped in the economy of desire. To achieve any sense of free expression, the individual is increasingly dependent upon the latter wager. Power through numbers, though somewhat effective within the situation of early capital, is less important in late capital, as the praxis of quantity/power has hit its critical mass. Globally, an internet of unity is needed that at present is just not feasible. Even within national borders, activist organizations are encountering points of critical mass. It is a paradox; to be effective, the organization must be so large that it requires bureaucratic hierarchy. But due to its functional principle of rationalization, this rigid order cannot accommodate multiple perspectives among its members. Splintering occurs, and the organization is consumed in its own process. Perhaps it is time to reassess the idea of quantity as power. Even with the best of intentions, large

groups inevitably subordinate the individual to the group, consistently running the risk of dehumanization and alienation. It should now be asked, can the model used by the nomadic elite be appropriated for the cause of resistance?

Although the nomadic elite may be a unified power, it is more likely that this class exists as interrelated and interdependent cells powerful enough to control segments of social organization. The interrelationship between the power cells develops not by choice, but by nonrational process. These cells are often in conflict, continually moving through a process of strengthening and weakening, but the transcendental social current of late capital blindly proceeds, untouched by the contingencies of conflict. Repression and exploitation continue unabated. The individual agents that labor within the cells enjoy greater autonomy (freedom from repression) than those below them; however, they are also caught in the social current. They do not have the choice to stop the machinations of late capital's process. The genetic code of these individuals is also contingent; it is not essential to the process. They could be replaced by any genetic sequence, and the results would remain the same, since the power is located in the cells, not in the individual. An individual may access power only so long as he resides in the cell.

Technology is the foundation for the nomadic elite's ability to maintain absence, acquire speed, and consolidate power in a global system. Enough technology has fallen between the cracks of the corporate-military hierarchy that experimentation with cell structure among resistant culture can begin. New tactics and strategies of civil disobedience are now possible, ones that aim to disturb the virtual order,

rather than the spectacular order. With these new tactics, many problems could be avoided that occur when resisters use older tactics not suitable to a global context. The cell allows greater probability for establishing a nonhierachical group based on consensus. Because of its small size (arbitrarily speaking, 4-8 members), this group allows the personal voice to maintain itself. There is no splintering, only healthy debate in an environment of trust. The cell can act quickly and more often without bureaucracy. Supported by the power of technology, this action has the potential to be more disturbing and more wide-ranging than any subelectronic action. With enough of these cells acting—even if their viewpoints conflict—it may be wagered that a resistant social current will emerge . . . one that it is not easy to turn off, to find, or to monitor. In this manner, people with different points of view and different specialized skills can work in unison, without compromise and without surrender of individuality to a centralized aggregate.

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The rules of the game have changed. Civil disobedience is not what it used to be. Who is willing to explore the new paradigm? It is so easy to stay in the bunker of assurances. No conclusions, no certainty; only theoretical frames, performative matrices, and practical wagers. What more can be said? Roll the dice. End program. Fade out.

XI
1890

But in this unstable, unbalanced spirit, ideas crowd on one another, and escape, and give place to others, while those that disappear still leave their shadow brooding over those that succeed.

But in this unstable, unbalanced hypertext, ideas crowd on one another, and escape, and give place to others, while those that disappear still leave their shadow brooding over those that succeed.

XIII

1916

Animism came to primitive man naturally and as a matter of course. He knew what things were like in the world, namely just as he felt himself to be. We are thus prepared to find that primitive man transposed the structural conditions of his own mind into the external world; and we may attempt to reverse the process and put back into the human mind what animism teaches as to the nature of things.

Reality engines came to screenal man naturally and as a matter of course. He knew what things were like in the world, namely just as he felt himself to be. We are thus prepared to find that screenal man transposed the structural conditions of his own data nets into the virtual world, and we may attempt to reverse the feedback and put back into the human mind what reality engines teach as to the nature of things.

✱

1926

Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise. This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of "weakness" in some individual; but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being towards its end.

Anxiety in the face of cyborgs must not be confused with fear in the face of virtual demise. This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of "weakness" in some interface; but, as a basic state-of-media of Cysein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Cysein exists as sliding Being towards its disappearance.