

# Information and Power

*Published by Quintera n+1 #37 in 2015    Translated by the Revolutionary Technical Committee*

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Report at the 58th meeting with readers, 21.2.2015

*"We are approaching a stage of development of production in which the existence [of classes] has not only ceased to be a necessity but becomes an effective obstacle to production. Therefore they will fall as ineluctably as they arose. With them the State will ineluctably fall. Society, which reorganizes production on the basis of a free and equal association of producers, relegates the entire state machine to the place that it belongs from that moment on, that is, in the museum of antiquities next to the spinning wheel and the bronze axe." ( Engels , The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, 1884).*

*"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society. Those who manipulate this hidden mechanism of society constitute an invisible government that has the real power to govern in our country. We are governed, our minds are shaped, our tastes influenced, our ideas suggested mostly by men we have never heard of." Edward Bernays , Propaganda, 1923.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Yesterday**

### **From production and distribution societies to class ones**

Before the formation of human societies structured at a level just higher than that of the extended family, information was limited to individual transmission (one to one) or at most within the closed group (one to a few). The custodians of memory and collective abilities were the elderly, as demonstrated by the survival of ancient societies. Despite the subsequent increase in productive force, and consequently in social complexity, this structure does not undergo major changes. Knowledge continues to be transmitted according to the previous scheme, with the difference that verbal transmission is now accompanied by a system of graphic signs. Let's think about the painted caves of the Paleolithic: next to the memory of the elderly, there is now something impersonal that passes down invariant meanings over time that can be used by no matter what number of individuals and over very long periods of time, not directly linked to the individual duration of life. This is a great revolution, because with a limited number of signs it is now possible to "teach" something to present and future generations. This is demonstrated by the fact that, although the meaning has been lost, it is possible to identify a repeating structure, a phenomenon that can only be explained with a shared canon, consolidated and respected over time.

This very ancient scheme has remained unchanged through the millennia until today: from the information point of view, cave paintings are no different from the modern television system. In both cases there is a source that transmits a message and an indeterminate quantity of individuals who receive it (one to many). The superiority of Paleolithic transmission compared to that of more recent times, especially our own, monopolized by television, is demonstrated by the findings and further signs, this time spontaneous, which today we know how to read with sufficient precision: the presence of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* , Feltrinelli. Available free on the Web in English, Ed. Horace Liveright, 1928.

the paintings entailed some connected human activity, that is, the men who went there to carry it out *interacted* with them. In the age of television, however, the relationship with the image is one-way, there is no interaction.

The subsequent "Neolithic revolution", as it is rightly called, was even more disruptive. This revolution entailed a quantitative and qualitative explosion of agricultural production, with the material possibility of bringing the original communism to its maximum consequences, to the point of transforming it into proto-state forms. The late Neolithic was the period of maximum realization of what will be the "Know thyself" carved on the temple of Delphi and referred to the entire society.<sup>2</sup> At the height of the original communist social form, man had learned to enter into harmony with nature, not as an integral but unconscious part, but rather as a conscious integral part, capable of returning to it everything that was taken. That humanity, although obviously not making an "ecological" calculation, reflected it with its own internal functioning, because it needed to know exactly, that is, quantify, what it produced by transforming nature and what it distributed to its members as a return to nature itself. She needed to formally handle the information she had at her disposal, or rather, to invent a formal way to obtain maximum information about herself in order to use it for herself. She needed information as formalized self-knowledge.

A similar level of awareness and control of the man-nature relationship has never been achieved, and will never be achieved again by any subsequent society, up to and including capitalism. The "informational" mechanism that allowed such a great result is disarmingly simple. There are three basic steps: 1) production; 2) the mass; 3) distribution. All three steps are controlled by community representatives through the collection and use of data. But it is the central one, the storage in common large warehouses, which offers us the material for an unequivocal verification of the level of awareness reached by society at the highest level of original communism. There is archaeological trace of this social scheme from the 8th to the 2nd millennium BC, and its uniformity despite the very different places and times shows us that it worked very well; among other things, allowing "accounting" symbols to slowly transform into writing, and therefore allowing us to better understand the social mechanism. It goes without saying that there is a problem in interpreting the data. For example, since houses with an adjoining family warehouse have been found, some archaeologists maintain that only the surplus from each production unit was taken into storage. Others maintain, based on the size of the common warehouses, that all the product was brought to the central

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<sup>2</sup> Delphi was a Panhellenic sanctuary also known outside Greece (the Egyptians also participated in the reconstruction of the main temple after a fire). A sacred place certainly existed in the Mycenaean era and the temple was probably made of wood. The famous phrase, when it was carved on the pediment of the temple after the second reconstruction, in stone, was already interpreted as "Know your limits". However, the fact that the legend attributed it to Socrates, but that in reality it is much older, directs us towards the ancestral meaning: "To know the world you must first know how to know yourself". This interpretation has universalist implications, given that we find it among the Pythagoreans, in Christian patristics, in Eastern philosophies, in the Enlightenment, etc. Moreover, the Panhellenic nature of the place excludes the possibility that the phrase was addressed only to the individual who stood in front of the temple.

warehouse and was subsequently distributed to the peripheral warehouses. The latter thesis is correct, in our opinion, supported not only by archaeological evidence, but also by the fact that the same model survived until the end of the 2nd millennium, when there is evidence of it in written documents. After all, only a bourgeois mentality can devise that sort of selfish para-colcosian model which sees the family dominating the community nine or ten millennia ago. At Mohenjo-Daro, in the Indus Valley, among other evidence of a communist-type urban structure (3rd millennium BC), there is an enormous granary which cannot be explained only by the accumulation of a surplus with respect to private consumption, and there are no domestic granaries. A similar form occurs in Egypt, Minoan Crete and Anatolia in the Hittite period.

## **Maximum informed societies**

Therefore the central warehouse was the heart of the community, so much so that it is almost always combined with the temple and the "palace", two other representations of the social being. The warehouse recorded the incoming foodstuffs, divided them according to given criteria, marked the lots thus obtained and finally distributed the goods according to agreed lists. All material movements of perfectly known quantities were accounted for according to a system of *cretula* (fresh clay mixtures on which an identification mark was imprinted). Upon entry, the *cretula* was affixed, stamped and left to harden; on exit it was broken, removed and kept in the archive as a memory of the movement. Movements of the most diverse goods are noted on lists from the late era, when writing already existed, from raw materials to manufactured goods, from foodstuffs to livestock, from weapons to boats. This social form will suffer a double fate: on the one hand it will be swept away by the subsequent form, which will perfect the central model and become a state at the service of the dominant class in formation; on the other hand it will stabilize in the so-called Asiatic form, a transitional form frozen sometimes for millennia, no longer communist and not yet proprietary and classist.

But let's focus for a moment on the original communist form which reached its maximum level.<sup>3</sup> It tells us first of all that a well-structured communist society according to a "canon" consolidated over the millennia is possible (therefore not at all "primitive") and that it has this characteristic by virtue of the maximum information it can obtain in order to know itself perfectly. This allows it not only to harmonize the triple core of

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<sup>3</sup> Towards the end of the Neolithic, two types of communist societies developed: some without hierarchies, others with functional hierarchies: "*[In the pre-urban past] societies did not take the same egalitarian form. Some adopted a system of equality horizontal, characterized by the absence of hierarchies, others have known the coexistence of a substantial egalitarianism and conditions of social pre-eminence (vertical equality) detailed comparison between the Neolithic cultures [6th-5th millennium BC] of Halaf (northern Mesopotamia and eastern Anatolia). ) and Samarra-Ubaid (south-central Mesopotamia), and the analysis of the characteristics of the settlements, the economy and funerary customs, reveal the ways in which egalitarianism spread through these two contrasting systems, providing us with the multiple key to determining the nature and distribution of equality and to distinguish it*" (Marcella Frangipane, "Different types of egalitarian societies and the development of inequality in early Mesopotamia", *World Archeology*, 39:2, 151-176. The author is responsible for the excavations of Arslantepe, Turkey, a late Neolithic site where the transition from original communism to proto-classist society is very evident).

production-storage-distribution, but to come up with a provision to be used in the event of disruption to the system (famine, plague, war, etc.). We have evidence of this way of functioning until much later than the original communist form, limited to small populations and territories that could support a few hundred individuals. Compared to the form just described, the large homeostatic social forms with central administration, which are its natural development, inherit all the potential of the ancient communist system, develop them by adapting them to incomparably larger dimensions, and transform the incoming and outgoing information flows from a spontaneous phenomenon to a phenomenon regulated by protocols. Even at such an advanced level, private property does not yet intervene, so there cannot be any classes linked to it. The stratifications due to the technical division of labor are already configured as elements of a proto-state, but the ancient form resists the dissolution of which these elements are the bearers. Size is important: because the flow of information can no longer function spontaneously in an organic way, solid channels are needed to convey information from the nodes of the production-distribution network to an administrative centre, which in turn must be able to manage and use the information received and transmit instructions to the entire network. At this stage of development, the social form corresponds for the first time to a "cybernetic" organism, no longer biological but completely artificial, regulated by "sensors" that polarize (inform) the system so that it remains stable (the most trivial is that of the thermostat). The ancient civilizations that preceded, in the scale of forms, those of classical antiquity, synthesized in the Greco-Roman world, functioned according to this model.

For example, ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, ancient China, and the Inca world, can be seen in the transitional form between original communism and classical society. As one can imagine, the dimensions of these social forms were such as to require huge material means to keep a consequent administrative apparatus and also an army in operation, now necessarily oriented not only against an external enemy but against any internal forces capable of threatening the territorial and political unity achieved. From here on it is the history of class societies.

## **Minimally dissipative societies**

We always keep in mind that we are not dedicating ourselves to these topics only for the sake of knowledge and history but because we work in accordance with a simple yet fundamental principle, contained in the *Grundrisse* and in the texts of the Communist Left: the transition from capitalism to the future cannot be understood as a communist society if one does not study and understand the transition from ancient communist society to class societies. And what we are studying teaches us that organized societies, prior to classist ones, therefore prior to the appearance of slavery and any exploitation of men by men, accumulated an extraordinary quantity of energy and applied it to the modification of the environment (monumental buildings, infrastructure, material production) without collapsing. It would be impossible for us to realize the greatness of certain achievements obtained with primordial technologies if we did not know that they were the result of a great organization, that is, of a great quantity of information.

Therefore, to lay the foundations of a discussion on "information and power", from now to the first phase of future society, it is necessary to identify the turning point, that is, the revolution in the broad sense (not therefore simply the revolt, insurrection or similar) in their respective eras. And since it is work that we have already done<sup>4</sup>, we limit ourselves to remembering it: the first great transition is the conscious organization, by our species, of its own existence and reproduction through a "systemic" social structure, that is, made up of parts that enter into a relationship with each other on the basis of *self-knowledge*. This is a real revolution, which takes place when for the first time - in a generalized and non-episodic way - data from the past is used in the present to plan the future (reversal of practice). This structure survives until the threshold of the transition to class societies. Its highest phase is the one which, as we have indicated, uses the characteristics enhanced to the maximum by original communism as a springboard for the subsequent form. It is the phase in which we find the maximum efficiency in the man-nature relationship: since information is neither matter nor energy, this efficiency is explained by the fact that an informed system at least partially escapes the second law of thermodynamics, that is, dissipation decreases instead of increasing it (entropy transformed into negative-entropy). In this stage, harmony occurs between the elements of the system and the environment that informs and nourishes it. Not only does the system assume, use and disseminate information, but it searches for it in a wider environment if it does not become available spontaneously. An easy example is the network of "nilometers", structures that measured the parameters of the Nile flood from which the administration of the "provinces" of Egypt precisely deduced the size of the subsequent harvest. The triad production, storage, distribution is enriched by a fourth element: an environment sensor that allows us to know future production. In Egypt the particular situation of the Nile, the regularity of its floods, the possibility of having perfectly comparable data, made the survey almost automatic; but elsewhere, for example in China, the automatism was replaced by the equivalent detection by expert technicians, with the same final result.

The methods for obtaining data useful for a centralized administration remained confined to the field of "economic" surveys for a long time; but as soon as an embryonic state developed, alongside the collection of quantitative data on production, etc. The work of gathering information on the behavior of the population or forces of other nations began. The "know thyself" was also extended to "others", in short it became a political fact. This kind of *ante litteram intelligence* developed very quickly and traces of it can be found in the texts that have come down to us through archaeological prospecting. Having reached the threshold of the state, Egyptians, Hittites, Assyro-Babylonians, Mycenaeans kept an eye on each other and controlled their own population. The transition from the communist to the classist order was marked by a great development in the collection, use and dissemination of information. The state cut its teeth after society had invented proto-police and proto-espionage, not as oppressive institutions but as tools necessary for the development of information in scenarios of increasing complexity. Large-scale

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<sup>4</sup> See *n* + 1 nn. 26 of 2009; 27 and 28 of 2010.

information became *essential*, as stated today in the presentation of the Information System for the Security of the Republic on the homepage of its website:

*"Intelligence is the tool that the State uses to collect, store and disseminate to interested parties, whether public or private, information relevant for the protection of the security of institutions, citizens and businesses. Intelligence carries out, therefore, a fundamental and essential role for which it uses professionals from different environments who act according to particular procedures aimed at safeguarding the confidentiality of the operators and their activities."*<sup>5</sup>

## ***Intelligence even before the state order***

The ancient social orders, having reached the level of development that led to the birth of cities, were hungry for information. Before anyone officially called themselves the "Eyes and Ears of the King", i.e. spy, society had already expressed data collection and processing systems into existence. The foundation of a city, the layout of a road, the discovery of a mine, the construction of an aqueduct or the identification of an aquifer, required organized groups of men who, in a technical division of labor which was no longer elementary, dedicated themselves to research, inspections, surveys, reports, projects and coordination. Intelligence in the strict sense, espionage, was of no use when the war took place in a limited field between tribes that numbered a few dozen elements. At that stage there was little we knew about each other to need information-gathering structures. However, when society develops and has already produced such structures within itself, they be, with little change, adapted to other tasks.

And they are adapted at surprising speed, given that all of antiquity is pervaded by them in a short time. The process that leads "civilian" structures to become one with military ones is quite interesting for us. If the transformation of the information collection and processing system is very rapid, the ancient society offers strenuous resistance to the change in an institutional, i.e. state, sense. The state itself struggles to assert itself against a well-organized society that has no need to provide itself with an instrument of class domination. And in many cases revolts break out in defense of the ancient harmony. We need to get to the first half of the 1st millennium BC to see the birth among the Assyrians of the first state structure dedicated exclusively to information understood as *intelligence*, with the relative introduction of ciphered texts, optical transmission systems, and state terror as propaganda. The Persians would inherit this system, which was then extended to the immense territory that Alexander brought together, exacerbating the need for control.

Republican Rome did not have, for some centuries, information systems of particular importance. Naturally, they had perfected the public system of survey, construction and maintenance to the maximum; however, even at the time of Julius Caesar, Rome did not have much sympathy for espionage. With Augustus, things changed, but in a particular sense that we will look at separately. A vast and powerful *intelligence system* was instead developed under Diocletian, in the era in which the

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sicurezza nazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/cosa-facciamo/l-intelligence.html> On the SISDE website, the archive of the periodical *Gnosis* contains various articles on ancient *intelligence* .

Empire began to be seriously threatened by the pressure of barbarian populations beyond borders which were excessively vast in extension. In this situation, information became a question of life or death.

The Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, its mirror opponent, perfected the information system by relating the ancient tasks of "know thyself" to the new mercantile reality. Above all, Venice devised a capillary system that was unprecedented in highly organized societies: instead of entrusting the collection of information solely to special state bodies, it transformed every single Venetian citizen into a special agent in the field. Every inhabitant of the Republic, no matter their class, had the obligation to communicate to the Venetian authorities everything he learned of, at home, and above all, abroad, that could concern the interests of the community, that is, of the mercantile oligarchy. It was the last remnant of ancient conditions at the service of the then very modern capital. After which the baton passed to the England of Elizabeth the Great, under whose reign the first true, modern, complete state-run specialized information, counter-information and disinformation system was born.

## **Language, information and the medium**

If we compare the means, purposes and results of yesterday and today with those we can predict for tomorrow, we immediately notice an enormous difference, a leap that only a revolution can make. The Internet is not a simple evolution of the telephone and television, it is something more. And, as we have seen, the means devised by men then influence men themselves, forcing them to adapt to developments, whether foreseen or not. It had already happened with machines in general, and with their transformation into *a system of machines*, up to the automated factory. But with networks we have entered another dimension.

The current processing of information with electronic tools is completely new both in terms of processing power and the possibility of relating the information itself via networks. We are no longer "simply" faced with the system of machines as the "general automaton" examined by Marx (social brain). The mechanical system was and is a factor of communism through the historical increase in the organic composition of capital and therefore the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. That is to say, it was and is part of the real movement that abolishes the current state of things. The electronic system, on the other hand, is already intrinsically communist. While for example in the mechanical system the communist sphere was inside the factory as the partial worker did not produce goods<sup>6</sup>, in the electronic system there are now millions of people who provide tens of millions of hours of work producing non-goods outside of the firm. The electronic system is no longer like the mechanical one which represented the necessary basis for communism: it is already a "sample of communism" in this society.<sup>7</sup> What is no longer at stake is just a "final cause" like the one which, desired and designed, informs our behavior in its realization: directly, independently of the will of men, the way of obtaining

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<sup>6</sup> See *Partial labourer and production plan*, cit. in note 3.

<sup>7</sup> See *Property and Capital*, available on request via our (n+1) website. See also *A specter haunts the Net*, n +1 n. 25 of 2009



information, seeking it and distributing it already precipitates towards a world of non-value.

We have seen that in all societies, no matter how little they are developed, there is a vital need for information. And consequently, as soon as this need stabilizes, even bigger needs emerge. As soon as hominization allows it, language develops. It is inevitable: man is a fragile being, too weak to survive in a hostile environment and therefore obliged to compensate with the social body for what the individual body lacks. To collectively organize a defense or a hunt, information is fundamental, calls, signs and codified behaviors are needed. Much research has been done on the behavior of man as a social being who, to make up for his lack of fangs, claws, horns, strength or speed must use intelligence and collective action. The anarchist Kropotkin spoke of mutuality<sup>8</sup>, the writer London of collaboration<sup>9</sup>, the entomologist Wilson highlighted, within the Darwinian theory of evolution, "group selection" is not only dictated by the biological factor:

*"Today it is essential to know that the individual's competition to grab resources and to mate is as important as the interest towards one's own group. Within a group, selfish individuals often have the upper hand. But in a competition between groups, the organizations based on cooperation prevail over communities composed of selfish individuals. And this is true for both insects and humans."<sup>10</sup>*

In all these cases, and dozens could be cited, information is a vital element. Man begins to plan his own existence very early, effectively highlighting, as Marx said, the difference between the bee and the architect. This difference is given by the quality of the information that social individuals transmit to each other by creating the specific transmission (one to many) and reception (many to one) channels that we have already talked about. During hominization, productive activity and language co-evolve, and the amount of information exchanged increases exponentially. We have already dealt several times with Engels' important work on the transformation of the hominid into a human being. Based on that trace, we extended the research towards recent studies on prehistoric instrumentation, with special attention to the function of lithic "tools" that show no signs of use. Some paleontologists deduce that in the hand-brain-language relationship they served to develop the areas of the brain dedicated, in fact, to language (a deduction later proven through computer reconstruction of the skulls with imprints of these areas). If both Engels' interpretation and recent verification are correct, it is clear that, when speaking of evolution, we must assume that it also applies to the methods of transmission and reception of information. In fact, the metamorphosis of signs, whether verbal, gestural or graphic, is particularly evident in what we call "art" of the Paleolithic, where naturalistic depictions and abstract graphic signs overlap. These signs, together with those found on small artefacts, generally made of bone or horn, demonstrate that they served to transmit information different from that communicated by voice. Already

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<sup>8</sup> Pyotr Alekseevich Kropotkin, *Mutual Support*, downloadable in pdf format at <http://isole.ecn.org/ponte/mediateca/mutapp.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Jack London, *The Iron Heel*, Feltrinelli.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Wilson, *The social conquest of the Earth*, Raffaello Cortina Editore.

the naturalistic figures of animals were certainly legible only with interpretation, but even more so the abstract signs had to be "read" according to a code that represented a compression of what was transmittable with speech.

*"It is certain that, in order to express themselves in material culture and be handed down from generation to generation, similar systems require the preliminary acquisition of an articulated oral language. In fact, language is the only communication system that intrinsically possesses a metalanguage capable of allowing the creation and the transmission of symbolic graphic codes, once created, these systems, even if they maintain a very close relationship with the language, respond to their own rules that are essential to understand."<sup>11</sup>*

## **A society without memory is dead**

Understanding these rules is fundamental for us who try to decipher those "notation systems", but also for those who used those systems, "writing" and "reading", given that to write a compressed notation a code is used that must be known also by those who read. From this point of view every shared notation system is writing. And all writing is artificial memory that can be read by anyone who has the interpretative key. But what interests us most is the fact that writing/reading begins to live with its own rules that separate it from those of spoken language even though they represent it. This process of autonomization is ultimately what allows man to be elevated above oral transmission, which is one to one, and reach graphic language, which is one to any number. The passage is characterized by an important evolution: initially the engraved signs, in particular the notches interspersed with systematic groups like a kind of bar code, are legible both by touch and by sight; later the signs become more subtle and numerous, therefore legible only through sight. At that point the memory deposited on matter has completed its evolutionary path. By then, a complete writing system is not so far off.

While in the case of "public" representations on the rock walls of shelters or caves we find a certain analogy with road or other signs, that is, the one-to-many sign indicating a prescription (permitted, prohibited, obligatory), with a "portable" and completely abstract notation system, like a form of ancestral mathematics, we have with reasonable certainty an information system managed by a few individuals, in an embryo of specialization. Even if it is still a technical and non-social division of labor, in Paleolithic society a sector specifically dedicated to information developed, and this became an increasingly complex vital food aimed at knowledge. We deliberately avoid as much as possible defining these elements of ancient social activity as "primitive". The variously spaced and oriented signs can contain much more information than we can imagine from our current forms of communication. The late-communist society of the Incas, for example, did not know writing but was admirably organized on the basis of information memorized by *quipu*, bands worn around the waist from which variously colored and knotted cords were hung. The colour, position and type of node formed a sort of binary

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<sup>11</sup> Francesco d'Errico, "The first recorded information", *Dossier of Le Scienze* n. 12, Summer 2002. In the same issue see also Enrica Fiandra, "The birth of the administration".

matrix from which information could be obtained for comparison with a given reality. For the calculations, there were nodes that represented the numbers from 1 to 9, plus the zero, which was the absence of a node (for the calculations, abacuses on tile tablets were most often used). There are several theories on the functioning of Inca notation, one interpretation being very divergent from the other, but it is certain that this memory/writing had the same function as the Mesopotamian tablets. In fact, each *quipu* was disposable: it was wet, dried in the sun, colored and impregnated with adhesive substances. Having fulfilled its function, it was destroyed or more often archived.

The Inca world extended from present-day Quito in Ecuador to Santiago in Chile (today 5,200 km of highway), and was closely connected by 30,000 km of roads that allowed fast communication via relays of couriers trained in running (*chasqui*). The Incas did not know the horse and did not use the wheel even though they knew it, but the couriers managed to keep the network of administrators and the center informed by moving at an average speed of 150 km a day, 24 hours a day. Each courier traveled at an average speed 20 km, leaving the bag with the *quipu for the next one*. The Spanish invaders immediately understood the importance of the Inca information and communication system for the survival of that society, and crushed it by destroying all archives. Twenty million human beings immediately found themselves without historical memory, a fact that probably had more effect than terrible weapons and diseases.

In a society at a still organic stage (and even more so in a developed communist society), the social entity that collects, stores and distributes information has a role similar to that of the genome, the repository of information for the entire species. In a society divided into classes, especially in the most powerful and deadly of all, capitalism, the single entity or the many entities that handle information, do so for a single class within the species, and this has never happened in nature. It is necessary to return, with the means and knowledge accumulated in the meantime, to the original organic system, eliminating the monstrosity of a social body that hands over its genetic code as property to a single class; which among other things represents only a small part compared to the whole.

With the reaching of the supreme stage of capitalism, the formulation "the dominant ideology is that of the ruling class" becomes "the dominant ideology is that which allows Capital to survive itself". The human species in these conditions is an accessory, just as a population of twenty million human beings deprived of their reason for existing became accessory.

## **Society, know thyself**

The leap into the new society will lead to the appearance of a new entity, which is the custodian of the genetic code (or memory, information, etc.). It cannot simply be the evolution of an existing entity but will be its total metamorphosis. It will not be the state, which will go towards self-extinction; it will not be the political party of the revolution, which will no longer have reason to exist in the absence of a bourgeois party to fight against (*partito* = part of a whole that is opposed to the other part); it will not be some

intermediate body such as a council or union, given that the political extremes to be mediated will no longer exist. Instead of all this, it will be a new entity that will take the place of the political party to manifest itself, with the whole of society, as *something else*, that is, as a full representative of the species. And obviously, it will be able to do it, because already in the dying society, it will have already been *something else*. This path is not at all obvious in the "Marxist" context.<sup>12</sup> The language we use today is still contaminated by terms whose meaning is worn out due to a counter-revolution that has lasted for decades. It is useless to repeat what should really be meant by communism, party, organic, revolution, etc., let's make an effort to reject *in-place communist definitions*. It is easily understood that there is a difference between communist society and any other social form, but normally it is understood much less that the major difference *does not consist in the socialization of the means of production and the like, but in resuming the path which was interrupted by the class societies*, to accumulate the energy necessary for the leap into developed communism. We have seen that the original communist society, having reached its maximum efficiency, was in optimal balance in relation to the degree of development and metabolic exchange with the environment; and, in regards to information and communication, had already produced all the elements that would be inherited and strengthened by subsequent societies. Now we must see how these societies have processed information and communication, raising them (unconsciously) to the level of developed communist society.

With writing, the organization and use of memory and information become so powerful that they influenced the entire society, shaping it. The quantitative notation inherent to production and distribution immediately involves the need for calculation, and writing becomes something else, it becomes mathematics, which, in turn, induces ever higher levels of abstraction, as demonstrated by the Mesopotamian tablets and the Egyptian *ostraca* which report complex calculations. Another aspect of the capacity for abstraction is philosophical language, originally not separated from the rest of knowledge and including myth, until the birth of religion. When we reach this point, language, with everything it conveys, has already become profoundly autonomous and lives its own life. And since at this point classes exist, language, knowledge, information and communication become the cage within which the dominant ideology confines society. Which now will only be able to firmly believe that it lives in a world that will never change, which at most can be improved. Until obviously the subsequent revolutionary rupture and the advent of another class society.

While the original communist society used its own self-knowledge to get into an equilibrium with nature, or rather, *within* nature, class societies use estranged knowledge to avoid equilibrium and grow quantitatively *at the expense of nature*. Therefore their

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<sup>12</sup> PCInt., *Thesis of Naples* : "We use not only the knowledge of the past and present of humanity, of the capitalist class and also of the proletarian class, but also a direct and certain knowledge of the future of society and humanity... which culminates in a classless and stateless society. Which perhaps in a certain sense will be a partyless society, unless a party is understood as an organ that does not fight against other parties, but which carries out the defense of the human species against the dangers of physical nature and its evolutionary processes" .

thermodynamic balance is so negative that it leads them to collapse after reaching a peak of development. Just as they use all the energy to grow, so they use all the information to defend themselves technologically and politically from the threat of collapse. Obviously they identify the enemy in the exploited classes, given that they rebel against the conditions in which they find themselves. And it is therefore natural that all information is aimed at consolidating the ideology of the eternity of classes and exploitation.

The original communist society did not need mystifications and could not even imagine giving itself a specific information system to consolidate itself. It was stable and balanced and for this reason it was defenseless against the nascent class society. It did not become extinct at all, it was swept away by an expropriating wave of unprecedented violence, and where this did not happen it transformed into the homeostatic form without private property but with social division of labor and proto-state (the so-called Asiatic form and its variants).

All this was not "wanted" by anyone, although obviously at a certain point the economic and political interests of the now possessing classes began to appear on the scene. In this evolutionary process Marx identifies two elements that represent the time bomb that has blown up all the societies that have existed so far and will blow up the capitalist one in an even bigger fashion: the development of the social productive force and quantitative growth. The first has no theoretical limits; the second is by its nature exponential and therefore necessarily limited in time. When quantitative growth stalls, it slows down the development of the social productive force and the entire political superstructure participates in the slowdown. At that crossing point between the two curves, the revolution explodes, blowing up the whole of society. While the material process can be followed with the criteria of science, the political process must be approached taking into account that science cannot be done on the basis of what a society says about itself. This is what the passage says, as famous as it is, little digested in its extraordinary simplicity and heuristic power, which we read in the *Preface to For the Critique of Political Economy*<sup>13</sup>

Some observations: 1) the material, qualitative evolutionary process of the social productive force is common to all societies, from the original communist one to the future communist one; 2) the political and ideological evolutionary process, which we must not let interfere with scientific analysis, has a lot to do with information and communication; 3) if the dominant ideology is the result of the material process of capitalist production and reproduction, the result of the communist mode of production will lead to a revolution in the field of knowledge and information.

Ancient communist society knew itself but had no defense against the emergence of its mortal enemy; the modern one has millennia of terrifying experience at its disposal. In relation to productive power, capitalism is the social form least capable of self-regulating and planning its own future but, paradoxically, it is the one that has

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<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx, *For the Critique of Political Economy*, Collected Works, United Publishers, vol. XXX.

accumulated the most potential resources to be able to do so. In fact, it is only with the maturation of capitalism that the definitive means have been prepared to move from the Darwinian realm of necessity to the superior one of freedom. Which means moving from the uncontrolled causal chains of nature to foreseen and implemented schemes.

## **From information to law: the background of the state**

The information emitted by a human group has influence on other groups; contact between groups with different linguistic codes can produce a merger or, on the contrary, a deeper division. It is natural that small groups have no need to establish a state for themselves. Both according to myth and according to history supported by archaeological evidence, the latter is the result of aggregations around a pole of attraction, which at a certain point developed in an urban sense. However, urban development is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of the state. There have never been states without cities, while instead there have been flourishing urban societies without states.

The role of language and information is obviously crucial for the development of "national" entities: a nation must at least be characterized by a same language and not too dissimilar rules of life, in order to be able to refer to a shared "code". During national formation, heterogeneous human groups, driven by elementary interests, come into contact in different ways that produce different outcomes:

- 1) In the presence of incompatible codes, i.e. not understood by the members of the groups, destructive factors are unleashed, and an aggregation can only take place through a war with relative elimination or assimilation of the defeated;
- 2) In the presence of similar codes, therefore compatible, i.e. understood by the members of the groups, phenomena of gradual growth appear up to a limit regulated by homeostatic processes;
- 3) In the presence of different, compatible, i.e. understood, codes, a syncretic growth becomes possible, whereby the differences fill gaps (social osmosis) and knowledge adds up, producing an increase in economic and military power.

Although it is difficult to draw rigorous schemes regarding social facts, we note that, *roughly speaking*, the three points can be assimilated to as many historical examples: 1) the Mongol Horde; 2) ancient Egypt; 3) the Roman Empire. We purposefully choose three absolutely unmistakable examples to come up with an idea as to how intimately connected the information emitted by a social form is to its structure; even without knowing anything about the three civilizations, anyone has certainly recorded the message they emanate without any possibility of confusion: steppes, horses, gallops; very fine river civilization; mighty total empire. Which laws the respective systems were governed by can almost be deduced from the aesthetics they emanate: The first, a strong tribal character. The second, a millenary stability. The third, the rule of law. Naturally the three processes of national formation were not at all so

linear but much more troubled, each with a notable overlap of characteristics, but it is easy to understand that the most promising evolutionary factors from the beginning were those that gave rise to the third. Roman syncretism, the ability to absorb everything from neighboring, assimilated or subjugated peoples, in exchange for "Romanity", created the power of the Empire. The parable about the free power of information is well known:

*"If two men exchange euros for dollars, the total sum does not change. However, if they exchange information, the total sum doubles."*

Where does the doubling come from? From the fact that in the exchange, no information is lost between the two parties. Knowledge increases knowledge, and this has material implications in technologies, methods and organization. Among many different codes, aggregated under a single unifying principle, a translation code is needed. The language becomes more complicated, information begins to need its specialists. In ancient societies, including the Greek one and excluding Rome, there was no body of laws, no reference code, therefore the coordinating bodies did not have a "judiciary", and the judgment of any misdeeds was variable on a case-by-case basis. Medieval law was also based on collections of customs. In a complex and vast society like that of Rome, the unifying translator code instead became the written law, and this type of information, inherited, memorized, transmitted and used in an exemplary and pragmatic way, became essential for the life of the state.

A long journey was completed with Rome. The central bodies of every social form always had the need to make known the rules for the good functioning of the more or less complex whole. The power of the classes that became such and then dominant was gradually based on this nervous system of societies. The evolution of the state starting from its embryos occurred hand in hand with that of writing, information and communication. The first striking document of this journey is the Code of Hammurabi. Its importance does not consist in the fact that it meticulously lists 282 laws - such lists also existed previously - but rather in having collected in a single code, not only generic prescriptions, written as reminders for those who had to impose rewards and punishments, but actual laws "dictated by the gods" to maintain order on earth, valid as such and invariant throughout the territory controlled by the state. And, most important of all, *published* on very hard basalt steles, mass-produced and placed in the squares of all the cities of the empire. We are at around 1800 BC, and the fact that at such an ancient date a center must inform the entire periphery on the rules of coexistence of a society is a real paradigm with respect to the theme we are developing. The king-priest does not limit himself to listing prescriptions to be kept in the drawer for the use and consumption of those responsible for resolving issues, but by addressing the entire population as a representative of a "center", he embodies a public power based on information. Of course, the army's weapons help, the principle of state authority imposes itself before the actual state even exists. The population does not know how to read, but it does not matter, the principle is established, the king's representative on site will read for everyone and conform his behavior to the code. The entire chain of government will gradually acquire awareness of being a dominant class and the population, conversely, will be even more aware of being a subordinate class.

We have already written elsewhere that the great revolts in the ancient world, before the appearance of the state, broke out precisely to prevent the state from establishing itself. Obviously the populations could not rise up against an institution that did not yet exist, but wherever there were symptoms of a break with the communist past, signs of change with respect to the ancient harmonies, there were episodes of social war. Around the 13th century BC a destructive wave hit the shores of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The old theory according to which the invasion of the Dorians would have had domino effects on the civilizations of the area has finally fallen. Archaeological research has shown that the centers of power of the time were almost all destroyed violently, almost always by fire. Among all the hypotheses put forward by archaeologists and historians to explain the crisis that caused the flourishing civilizations of the Aegean (Pylos, Mycenae, Knossos), Anatolia (Hattusa), Syria (Ugarit), and Cyprus to collapse, and in some cases to disappear, such as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, that of social fire is the most consistent with a revolutionary conception of transitions: fire is the typical weapon of revolts.

## **Hypercommunication and *damnatio memoriae***

If a lot of structured information is produced by the consolidation of societies, by their organization and centralization, even more is produced by a social revolution, or in any case by a change that upsets the existing order to the point of making it unrecognizable. We know that the *engines* of revolutions produce their *actors*, who move according to a script with a specific *style*.<sup>14</sup> We find this pattern admirably reproduced in a great social upheaval that affected Egypt during the Middle Kingdom.

Four centuries after Hammurabi, another ruler was preparing to introduce substantial innovations into society. This fact triggered one of the most extensive information battles in all of human history. An event that probably ended in civil war. The history is not perfectly known for the reason that it was knowingly erased, but from the archaeological finds, including the remains of the destruction, it is possible to summarize a chronology of events. It all began with a kind of "revolution from above". By "revolution" we mean, in the pre-classical context, defense of the persistence of original communism, a return to ancient harmony, the one that existed before some "progressive" fact tended to destroy it. In fact, before the advent of class societies, a revolution that had the aim of changing things in the present to obtain a better situation in the *future was unthinkable*; indeed, every suggestion at it was generally rejected by society. The revolts of pre-classical antiquity were therefore all "reactionary". We must be careful with the terms: Marx clearly states that even modern revolutions explode because men risk losing what they have conquered, but he adds that it is *precisely for this reason that they are forced to overthrow the old society and bring forth a new one*. On the contrary, the men of ancient classless civilizations fought precisely not to let the "new" assert itself, they opposed every symptom of the movement towards the formation of social stratifications, they fought for the preservation of communist-type organicity. The

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<sup>14</sup> See Amadeo Bordiga, *Fiorite primavera del Capitale*, available on our website at: [https://www.quinterni.org/archivio/filitempo/109\\_1953\\_fioriteprimavere.htm](https://www.quinterni.org/archivio/filitempo/109_1953_fioriteprimavere.htm)



aforementioned revolution from above had very ancient precedents, for example, the serious social crisis that marked the transition from the Old Kingdom to the first intermediate Kingdom in the 22nd century BC. But there are also examples of revolutions from below, as in Ebla, in Syria, when an elected "king" whose mandate expired attempted to transform his office into dynastic power.<sup>15</sup>

Around 1350 BC, Pharaoh Amenhotep IV became the leader of a vast and radical movement against the dominance of the Temple of Amun in Thebes. The current version attributes to the clergy of Amun a temporal power that obscured that of the pharaoh, so much so that a situation of dual power would have been created concerning the "ownership" of the temple and the "crown". This is a competitive version, brazenly filtered through modern social categories, but, despite some hesitation, we adopt it, given that the versions based on today's monotheistic religious mysticism are even worse. As usual, it is necessary to rely on the facts obtained from archaeological finds. Amenhotep IV actually undertook a campaign of renovation, not only of the immense Temple of the "god" Amun in Thebes, but of all the temples, destroying statues, cartouches and hieroglyphic cycles dedicated to it and replacing everything with new works dedicated to the Sun "god", Aton (the word "god", or "nether" for the Egyptians, is in quotation marks because it does not strictly indicate a *divinity* as we understand it today). The characteristics of the old solar deity were strengthened and used for a single universal cult. The pharaoh changed his name to Akenaten (meaning "satisfaction of Aton") and began great plans. We don't know what forces he really represented, but a slice of the population must have certainly been involved, given that society changed like never before. In fact, for several years old structures were demolished and new ones were built with the remains of the demolition, including a large capital city, Aketaton (meaning "Aton's Horizon"). Not only were social relations upset, but also those of language, figurative aesthetics, "foreign policy", official protocol, the cult of the dead, military organization, etc. For about fifteen years, a machine was set in motion that demolished old information and created new information. The superstructure was shattered to the roots but the method of production was not changed in the slightest. This is strange to say, the least because *revolutions* lead precisely to this.

The cult of the Sun had existed since time immemorial, and therefore Akenaten did not impose a new religion. The cancellation of the other deities from the temples was a political fact, because in practice they were eliminated only from official demonstrations and monuments; while, despite the provisions, they survived very well in daily practice, acting, as they did since prehistoric times, as an intermediary between man and nature.

Upon the death of the pharaoh, everything returned as before following the reverse procedure: what had been destroyed was rebuilt and what had been built was destroyed. The images and texts were not merely allowed to rot away, instead everything was razed to the ground, including the new capital. Mountains of already squared stone

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<sup>15</sup> Edda Bresciani (ed.), *Literature and poetry of ancient Egypt*, Leyden Papyrus, *The lamentations of Ipu-ur*, Einaudi. Giovanni Pettinato, *Ebla*, Rusconi. The anthropologist Pierre Clastres argues that even war in general was a tool against the symptoms of state insurgency (*Archeology of Violence*, ed. Meltemi).

blocks were taken to the new construction sites. The restoration was led by a military leader, Horemheb, who was not from the dynasty. Perhaps even "restoration" is not the appropriate term, because Akenaten's was not actually a "revolution". As we have seen, the solar cult had already been practiced for centuries. During the V dynasty, a thousand years before Akenaton, numerous temples were built (one every ten years) dedicated to this cult. The ancient solar temple, among other things, could also have been dedicated to various "gods" in addition to the Sun, and Akenaten had probably not completely broken with tradition. So it is likely that two "restorations" of different types occurred within the same system: a return to the Aten and a return to Amun. Why? What if it had been a complete cycle of revolts to prevent the advent of state power through the priestly caste? Horemheb writes in a stele:

*"When I was crowned king, the temples of the Gods and Goddesses from Elephantine to the Delta swamps were in a state of abandonment. Their shrines were in ruins and had become fields of weeds. Their temples were as if they had never existed and their courtyards were like dirt roads. Egypt was in disorder and the Gods neglected this country... Then my majesty took advice from his heart, seeking every favorable possibility... building the temples again as eternal monuments... And to him Gods and Goddesses of this country have their hearts in jubilation... Exaltation reigns because something beautiful has happened."*<sup>16</sup>

The new pharaoh, with the cancellation of the heretic from history, had also appropriated his time of reign, but had not completely canceled the references to Aten, whose appearance was standard in gravestones. Ramesses I, his successor, initiator of the 19th dynasty, will do the same:

*"Mighty bull who appears in royalty as Aten, who consolidates the Maat across the Two Lands, the perfect God, son of Amun, born of Mut, the lady of the sky, to be ruler of all that Aten the Sun surrounds... His father Aten educated him while he was a youth in acting with a loving heart in renovating the monuments that were in ruins."*<sup>17</sup>

What happens to the great restoration if the powerful progenitor of the Ramessides is indeed the son of Amun, but in the regal guise of Aten consolidates the Maat, that is, the universal harmonic order? The sacred self-glorifications of the pharaohs should not be taken literally, but here we are talking about the restoration of the ancient order under the sign of Aton. Amun remains the protector, but the solar cult of Ra is revived from more ancient times. There is no need to go into more detail here. Ramesses I reigned for only one year but paved the way for a profound change: the "sacred" classes, the priests and court hierarchies, lost power in favor of the administration and the army. The feeble prefigurations of the state that had endangered the harmony of the ancient Maat were driven out the door and let back in through the window. A state will *never* be established

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<sup>16</sup> Franco Cimmino, Akenaten and Nefertiti , Rusconi. The stele was sculpted under Tutankhamun, a transitional pharaoh who died at 18 after reigning for nine. Horemheb had the young pharaoh's cartouche erased and replaced with his own. Writings on some monuments and on objects found in Tutankhamun's tomb refer to the young ruler as the "firstborn of the Aton", demonstrating that the solar cult survived the damnation of memory for some time.

<sup>17</sup> Franco Brussino, *Ramesses I. At the sources of the XIX dynasty* , ed. Upside down.

in Egypt, not even with the Ptolemaic Greeks<sup>18</sup>, but certainly the attempt crushed by the double restoration prepared the ground for one of the greatest propagandists of all time, a master of consensus manipulation, Ramesses II, less a cosmic intermediary, more a paternal executor of the Maat.

The two cycles of erasure and reconstitution of memory produced, in the space of a few years, a super-building activity notable even for a super-building civilization like ancient Egypt. In this period, for the first, and perhaps only, time in history, an entire society was called to change a sophisticated and consolidated system of information processing regarding its historical memory. To reach similar levels we need to get much closer to our own time, to modern parliamentary democracy, to Stalinism and Nazism; even if the comparison is improper, given that under capitalism the qualitative data of mystification has a specific weight incomparable compared to the quantitative data of information. And since we have mentioned the quantity and quality of information, let's end this Egyptian survey with a curious fact. The early dynasties wrote little. The first pharaoh, Narmer (XXXII century BC), left us a few well-wishes on offering tablets; during the 3rd dynasty (27th century BC) elegant but still sober depictions appear in the tombs of dignitaries. The Fourth Dynasty (26th century BC) was even less inclined towards decoration and monumental writing: its great pyramids and the temple of the sphinx are completely devoid of graphic signs. As time progresses, extra-economic, i.e. non-utilitarian but "political" communication intensifies, and for example the Theban tombs (from the 13th century), an underground mirror of the world of the living, present cycles painted for thousands of meters squared, where the deeds and divination of the dead are depicted. In short, propaganda. The peak is reached with the last phase of the Nile civilization, the Ptolemaic one (from the 4th century), during which every temple is covered on every single structure with reliefs, paintings, decorations, engravings. The older a society gets, the more it needs communication. Encountering difficulties of physical reproduction, it reproduces itself as an ideology, and writes, writes, writes...

## **Information from accounting to literature**

In the different areas, almost simultaneously, the first signs of literature appear alongside writings exclusively used for accounting, such as the transcription of cosmologies, myths and deeds of sovereigns. Later the text becomes a tale of stories that develop over time, such as the epic of Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia, the adventures of Sinhue in Egypt, the Bible in Palestine, etc. The information passes from the original, utilitarian one, concerning physical quantities of products and their use, to the "social" one, with the celebration of values such as heroism, courage, strength, intelligence, but also with representation of misfortune, meanness, misery, and death; and above all, behaviors appear that are inadequate to the canons established at that certain level of development, such as to provide the pretext for precepts. By introducing the passage of

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<sup>18</sup> *"The Egyptian language did not have a word corresponding to our 'state'... The rational definition of the word 'state' would have had no meaning for the Egyptians . "* Henri Frankfort, *The religion of ancient Egypt* , Bollati Boringhieri. Moreover, many are convinced that Egypt was a slave society; bourgeois ideology infects everything it touches.

time, therefore creating a historical view, poems, tragedies, collections of knowledge (philosophy) become at the same time memories of past behaviors, used as teaching materials, and prescription for future behaviours. Information becomes "educational", that is, it begins to be a means to "bring the member of society into shape", in the sense of integrating the individual within a pre-established canon. This is perfectly suited to the nascent class society, and it is therefore that from that moment on society will no longer be able to do without those tools that we today call propagandistic and which in their profound function serve to homogenize the individual within a given society. It is something completely different than the ancient "signage", the compression of the message in order to allow, prohibit or orient. With the predominance of the ancient-classical Greek and then Roman form, in Europe and around the Mediterranean democracies, oligarchies, tyrannies and various superstructures effectively set aside the foundation myths and epic motivations, and replace them with constructions of maximum rationality with respect to justifying the current state of things. Historical teaching is not cancelled, on the contrary, it is academically exalted but mummified in a body of clichés. After all, the superstructure is now in conflict with the real functioning of society. While the latter develops, its superstructure instead struggles until it prevents motion. In the "controlled" society everyone feels that the two levels no longer have anything to do with each other, that lying is the way of being of democracy (it's raining, thieving government); therefore the information communicated is the same as in Epimenides' paradox: "All Cretans are liars. I am Cretan." Mystification is greatest with democracy, and this is the reason why the latter is historically successful, becoming the best shell for the domination of Capital. It is obvious that establishing by majority which fraction of the bourgeoisie should govern the exploitation of the proletariat is equivalent to establishing it by other means, dictatorships, oligarchies, technocracies, etc.; in fact everyone governs in the name of the *demos* [TNOTE: *The People*].

Democracy or not, from the Greek to the Roman experience, first in the form of a republic then an empire, the essence of information lies in its being "oriented". The electoral writings of the candidates for the judiciary or the denunciations of their opponents are still evident on the walls of Pompeii; the language is very similar to today's, and the public showing of the strengths or weaknesses of those aspiring to manage power is similar. In any case, *propaganda* is not only *functional* to the system, be it the empire or decrepit capitalism, it is part of its structure. Class struggle sometimes manifests itself as a struggle within the same class, and this was the predominant aspect in the sophisticated politics of the empire; but the most striking social result achieved by the Roman policy of domination was the lack of plebeian struggle, the achievement of social unity through the total manipulation of the urban masses. Obviously large slave revolts (Eunus, Spartacus) were caused by class conditions, but they resulted in the attempt to immediately conquer freedom, in no way were they oriented towards social change. In fact, once the revolt was repressed and the rebels exterminated, everything went back to how it was before.

The Pax Romana was an objective to be achieved not only among the defenders of the *limes* [TNOTE: *The limits of the roman border*] and potential attackers, but also

among the internal social components, excluding that of the slaves, who actually increased in number and saw their conditions worsen. It was Octavian who at the end of the civil war managed to impose it with a policy of reform supported with great determination, and above all with great attention to the personal visibility of the *princeps civitatis* [TNOTE: *The roman emperor*], proclaimed Augustus to guarantee social stability. The famous transformation of the "city of bricks into a city of marble" was planned with the architect and urban planner Marco Vipsanio Agrippa, and was based on the impact of the imagery, the imagery of the monumentality and public usability of the works. All the arts were encouraged through the involvement of intellectuals, a work to which Gaius Cilnius Maecenas dedicated himself with great commitment, who promoted a kind of cultural unification around the revisiting of the foundation myths of Rome. Both Augustus and Maecenas, but also many collaborators, participated out of their own pockets in this great project of stabilization, and overall re-sacralization of the City, which ran in parallel with the divinization of the emperor.

As we can see, we are faced with something completely different compared to the crude electoral demonstrations where the message, whether true or false, was direct and explicit. And the difference was not even given by the incomparable distance that separated a local magistrate from the person of Emperor Augustus. The actual difference was in the artificial construction of a reality from which information could flow. While with Julius Caesar we still have a reality which, although highlighted with military triumphs and literary tools, is the one imposed by the collective destinies in which the brilliant leader participates, with Octavian Augustus the reality is reversed. Now it is the emperor who plans the destinies of the City, so much so that he commissioned Virgil (through Maecenas) to create a mythical genealogy of Rome (and of himself) based on the present power and the deification in progress. Even the agrarian reform projects Augustus realized that to keep Rome strong it was necessary to feed it with nearby and defensible, i.e. Italic, lands) were supported with Virgil's *Georgics*. It is a new form of communication with which Rome presents itself to the Romans, as if the "public" splendor of pre-classical civilizations was revived, with the key addition of an incomparable communicative capacity due to literary and artistic language. Poetry, theater, spas, arenas, forums, temples, statues, obviously legions, everything participates in spreading a spectacular Romanness that canonizes itself. And, just to be sure of going down in history in coherence with the image he had created in life, Augustus wrote the *Res gestæ divi Augusti*, glorifying himself in two languages, diverging between the Latin version and the Greek version, in order to please the Western and Eastern empires, respectively, shamelessly lying about the facts, thus anticipating the propaganda of subsequent centuries. It must be said that Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Hittite rulers had already adopted "historical" self-glorification, but in epigraphs not comparable to the *system* introduced by Augustus.

All this should not be interpreted as an abuse by a sinister and powerful individual in order to personally embody maximum power and, moreover, become very rich. History moves forward by seeking and finding its own interpreters: but in this case, for the first time, the entire structure of a world is aimed at propagandizing that world itself for the

purposes of its own preservation. Alexander the Macedonian's attempt had failed, now Augustus succeeded on the basis of favorable premises. The Hellenistic empire lasted a handful of years, the Roman one more than a thousand (two thousand if we also count the Byzantine part). At the peak, that is, with Augustus, the maintenance of the power, weakened by the civil war, was guaranteed by a leap in quality reverberated by the entire superstructure. It gave itself a sort of "quality standard", with a safe method to assure a desired "performance": paying for it. Widening the circle of interests so that it took root. Maecenas, rich, refined, already a patron of art in his own right, Augustus' best personal friend, was the right instrument to create the environment. Two thousand years later, the paths aimed at generating consensus, now absolutely tested and reliable, will take another name.

## Consensus engineering

Edward Bernays<sup>19</sup> worked for the democratic fraction of the bourgeoisie in order to consolidate its power. Others like him did the same job, believing in some cases that it could be done on the side of the working class. While the bourgeoisie produced pragmatic theories of the population's behavior under the influence of propaganda, the working class parties produced ideologies without any empirical correspondence with the behavior of the "masses". The term "engineering" *did* not exist in Italian except as "engineer's work", while today it has entered common language as an extended discipline that deals with the scientific principles for designing or improving machines, systems or processes or all of these things together; or as a methodology applied for the construction of these elements; or as knowledge to predict behavior in particular operating conditions; everything in relation to economic, safety, reliability, etc. implications.

Now, from the Roman Empire onwards, the methods for the extensive and rational use of propaganda to address consensus are known, perfected by the universalistic world of the Church and adopted through transformation by the Enlightenment revolution. What need was there to bring up a technical discussion like that of engineering? This is not trivial, if only because it brings out the usual observation: the bourgeoisie, a class incapable of planning its own society, rushes to sanction with its theories what has already happened in reality without its knowledge; its great capacity for projects dedicated to commodities corresponds to its almost zero capacity for control over its economic system. Beyond this, it is interesting to note how theories are influenced by material production. Engineering, among the disciplines related to production, is the one that most corresponds to the training or pragmatic application of technical-scientific knowledge. It is truly curious that it is projected into the sociological field, as if to underline the pervasiveness of production in relation to daily life. When language was not yet subject to the mystification of *political correctness*, the various Bernays, Le Bons<sup>20</sup>,

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Bernays, *Engineering of consent*, Oklahoma University Press (Amazon offers it for 499 dollars, otherwise unobtainable; citations and reviews on the Web. Available instead *Propaganda – Of the manipulation of public opinion in democracy*, Lupetti Editore.

<sup>20</sup> Gustave le Bon, *Psychology of crowds*, Tea.

Tardes<sup>21</sup>, Lippmans<sup>22</sup>, treated these themes naturally, as if they were objects inserted in a cycle of production, using a direct style that today makes you shudder. A very effective description of *fascist democracy*.<sup>23</sup>

We were therefore saying that at the time of Augustus we already knew very well how to manipulate the information system by means of *ad hoc creations*, aimed at conveying an "Idea of Rome". The interpenetration between the established power, its representatives and the image is already perfect and the communicative arsenal ready, only to be copied, as in fact happened. The need to "engineer consensus" therefore arises more from the way of being of society, than from the need to translate the facts into an accessory language of "politics" by "someone". It is the social need that brings out anyone who is willing to put themselves at its service, even if it were an emperor. It is wrong, in all times, to imagine that some Carlylian demon sits down to plan the deception of the masses. When "someone" is called to do the dirty work, it's because it's about sanctioning something that has already happened, it's just about supporting, ordering, rationalizing.

Under Augustus, personal wealth shapes society more than ever, information becomes a social need linked to wealth. It's not a conspiracy by someone against someone else: it's society expressing its need to "bring the subordinate classes into shape", because there is, also, confusion under heaven. Often the slaves freed by their master, the freedmen, enrich themselves by exploiting their intermediate condition which frees them from ancestral constraints. The classic Roman citizen of the upper classes, landowner and head of the extended *family* who does not disdain handling the plough, sees his almost sacred position corroded in favor of the rich monoculture producer, who instead is harassed by the banker and perhaps ruined by international competition. This proto-capitalism, which has no hope of emerging without a revolution, fragile in all its social aspects, has an absolute need to give itself an order to stabilize itself; and an Augustus is not the problem, but the solution, at least for three hundred years.

Now our conception of "dominant ideology" as an expression of the ruling class should be completely clear. Republican personal virtues are replaced by state virtues, and this in turn is embodied by the emperor who must devise something to amplify the power of the law. And what's better than turning into a god and asking the Roman intellectuals to dish out a divine genealogy? Quickly done: made to order here is Ascanius/Iulus, son of Aeneas, founder of Alba Longa, progenitor of the *gens* Iulia, ascendant of Romulus and Augustus. Zero reality, all myth and poetry, but in the meantime the *Pax Romana*

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<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *Opinion and the crowd*, The City of the Sun.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Lippman, *Public opinion*, Donzelli.

<sup>23</sup> "The individual does not have an opinion on all public matters... He does not know how to manage public affairs... He does not know what happens, why it happens, what should happen. I cannot imagine - nor does it exist the slightest reason to believe, like the mystical democrats - how could the mixture of individual ignorances produce in the mass a continuous force that gives direction to public issues... The public must be kept in its place, not only so that it can exercise its powers, but even more to allow each of us to live free from the shuffling and noise of the disoriented flock". Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1925. Available on Google books.

flourishes, ideological and well armed, bursting with positive information. The Roman citizen becomes a representative of the Nation, the citizens of the provinces are equal to him and the characters that "inform" the Empire multiply the *clientes*, a social condition which, from a citizen-patron relationship becomes a patron-group maintaining mutual obligations (entire communities became *clientes* of the generals who had conquered them, and followed their fortunes, including military ones). The stranger, who for the Greeks was the "barbarian", is now the "enemy", an entity that involves elementary binary information: alive outside the *limes*, dead if one dares to enter (the situation will change with the late empire, when barbarians will be needed to fight other barbarians).

With Byzantium the "form" will transcend towards the military and police state, whose army was capable of lightly killing thousands of insubordinate citizens. A police operation is famous for the riots that broke out after a chariot race at the circus in 532. The city garrison was unable to quell the revolt and therefore General Bellisario was called in with the army. The revolt was repressed but, according to Procopius, at the cost of 30,000 deaths.<sup>24</sup> A truly modern state was beginning to emerge.

## **Total information and its communication**

When with Constantine the victorious Christianity was elevated to the state religion, the Roman tradition of tolerance and religious syncretism began to die out under the pressure of the new way of providing information. Even pagan imperial Rome demanded that the divinity of the emperor be recognized, but beyond this, everyone could dedicate themselves to their own divinities without excessive problems. Stated Christianity claimed to have an increasingly greater say in shaping society with an all-encompassing penetration into all fields. One of the modes of existence of Roman paganism was a syncretic universalism, based on the unity of language, citizenship and laws, whereby a spontaneous, almost automatic social unity was guaranteed, *despite* the differences. Christianity introduced a new type of universalism, which maintained language and citizenship but gradually replaced law with religion, *eliminating* difference. A new religion that replaced the certainty of the law with ideal and therefore questionable propositions except for the *diktats* of the authority could only be destructive towards the stability of the Empire. Constantine had understood this well, ordering the Council of Nicaea, presiding over it and forcing it to adopt any solution on the topic of the Trinity, in order to neutralize the growing centrifugal forces. These pressures were dampened, but at the price of the barbarians in the process of Christianization taking sides with Arianism, that is, with what was now considered a heresy. And the legions were recruiting entire tribes, so abstract notions about the Trinity were turning into damned concrete facts.

If the depth of revolutions is measured by the destruction of the old society, Christianity was a very profound revolution. Roman civilization was demolished from the

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<sup>24</sup> Procopius of Caesarea can be considered one of the first to use manipulated truths to support thematic theses. He wrote praiseworthy works in favor of Justinian and Theodora and then "changed his mind" and wrote others, of an opposite tone, upon the death of the emperor (see *Secret Stories*, Rizzoli BUR; *The Gothic War*, Garzanti).



foundations, starting with the buildings that provided the material quantity of marble that was reused, directly or burned in lime kilns, to build churches. Obviously in addition to the temples, forums, theaters, rich private villas etc. the systemic relationships, the roads, the aqueducts, the post stations, the administrative data, the land register, the fleet, the legions disappeared. Of course, the collapse also occurred with the help of the barbarian invasions, responsible for the chaos from which a completely new society arose, apparently backward, truly undersized, certainly simplified.

The only coherent network remained the Church, which due to its universality, replacing the Roman one, became the backbone of the new society. We have discussed the situation of Italy in feudal Europe elsewhere<sup>25</sup>, therefore here we strictly limit ourselves to the central theme which is that of information, its use and its communication. The external message transmitted by the Christians of the first three centuries was that of a small sect among the many that the Jewish world had produced. Even after the internationalization and rooting in the center of the Empire, due to Paul of Tarsus, the sect was not very developed, and certainly practiced the *communio* of goods in some communist variant of daily life, such as that of the Essenes, as is attested in the New Testament.

The situation around the end of the third century was different, when the last persecutions were certainly caused by the numerical growth of the Christians and above all by their intolerance which interfered in some way with the politics of the Empire: in that period, which ended with the edict of Constantine, the Christians had already become a social power and, with the experience accumulated in semi-clandestine status, they behaved like a *party*. Even more: their centralized structure, with the figure of the Pope at the top, the network of bishops at the intermediate level and the presbyters and assisting deacons at the base, already prefigured a kind of state within the state. No religion had ever had such a vast formal structure.

From that moment on, for the new party in power it was only a matter of taking large steps towards the consolidation of the structure and the program to prevent any attempt at restoration, with a finalized and widespread activity which had as its corollary an explosion quantity of members. The underlying ideology, i.e. the type of religion, was of little influence, or was so only because it permitted a political structure of the type that was actually adopted. Having conquered power, Christianity could afford the luxury of not managing it directly. It left the crown to the emperors and, with ups and downs, pulled the strings from the throne of Peter. For a thousand years, Europe was a territory fragmented into an infinity of local powers, but united from an ideological point of view. In fact, a single ideology/religion/law dominated, capable of absorbing or combating any adverse phenomenon by continuously moving armies far and wide in the name of God and His will. To use a concept typical of the Communist Left, Christianity was *anti-formist* as regards the elimination of the ancient social form, *reformist* as regards its chameleon-like capacity for adaptation over the centuries, *conformist* as regards its own conservation. It had inherited the universal language of the pagans of Rome, and now

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<sup>25</sup> See *n* +1 n. 35.

from a completely different Rome it used that language as an all-encompassing instrument of domination.

On the information side, the social productive force proceeded apace despite some ecclesiastical interference on scientific issues in conflict with the Scriptures. The written word had a widespread diffusion, aimed at preparing the organizational network, while verbal communication from the pulpit was the only interface with the mass of the faithful. The written heritage was brought back to a formal unity with reference to a precise canon, which did not, however, exclude the conservation of different knowledge, even to the limit of compatibility, as in the case of the Gospels. The success of this approach was also guaranteed by the ease with which the "canonized" material was susceptible to semantic compression, some formulas infinitely repeatable, aggregating beyond meaning, even when Latin was no longer the current language. The *catechism* not only gave answers, it also pre-packaged the questions, but above all it was a complex system from which to distill a simple essential, that is, precisely, the formula. Today the Catechism of the Catholic Church is printed in an edition of 900 pages, from which one can obtain a booklet for children or a good seminarian's manual.

The late-communist urban civilizations of production/distribution knew themselves thanks to a natural development of the information network, but after then no organization, which in the meantime had become "political", has ever covered the territory so widely with its informants and representatives like the Catholic Church did. No one has ever had the possibility of activating such a complex and integral information system, which goes from the registers of births, marriages and deaths to the registration of feudal agreements regarding lands, to the pure and simple presence of a priest even in the smallest village to institute of Confession, a true ultra-pervasive *intelligence apparatus* structured on the basis of normal religious activity. No one has ever been able to reverberate their ideology through a formidable permanent exhibition of their history, illustrated, sculpted by the best artists of every era in thousands of churches and monasteries. No one has ever had unlimited resources to find, preserve, copy the works of the ancients for their own benefit. This had the negative side of the Index, the Inquisition, the book burnings; but on the whole, if the *armarium* [TNOTE: A closet] of the poor monasteries might be short of books, the Church as such very soon began to collect them in quantity, especially in the large and rich monasteries, where they were also copied, not to mention the private libraries of cardinals and bishops.

A religion born syncretic, became the enemy of ancient (paganism) and contemporary (heresies) syncretism; it seemed to close the world in a suffocating grip, to make the whole society retreat compared to the ancient splendors of Rome, to control the individual even in the sphere of thoughts. While in the pagan world everything was permitted except what was forbidden, in the Christian world it seemed that everything was forbidden except what was obligatory. This seemed to impede the dynamics of information and action, as it changed something important about our signage metaphor (yes, no, it depends). It *seemed* like this to the Renaissance and its bourgeois

successors; but in reality, the most recent studies on the Middle Ages reveal a very dynamic, universalist and less obscurantist society than is normally believed.

Just as graphic information was canonized in the most ancient societies to the point of prefiguring writing, so the Empire had canonized its own communication involving the entire aesthetic sphere; Christianity seemed to canonize the mind. But the total information had gaps through which everything could pass: the councils had established that everything that is not canonized is suspect, and this way of proceeding certainly has a unifying power. However, the Middle Ages demonstrated that many churchmen developed interpretations of the Scriptures right on the border between orthodoxy and heresy. The totalitarianism of the Church was rather selective: it was the antechamber of the stake for men and books targeted, but other men and books escaped the danger and provided material for knowledge and elaboration. Before St. Thomas, Aristotle was a philosopher among others and not even well-regarded (for example by the Franciscan school), but a work on the frontiers of knowledge of the time transformed him into the secular prophet of Christianity (with all due respect to St. Augustine). So on the one hand Christianity with its Church was stabilized with the canon; on the other, it left every way open to adapt to the world, which allowed it not to fossilize in a perennial homeostasis. This "Aristotle effect" allowed a powerful de facto criticism of previous social forms, in short, it was a great revolution.

## **Total communication and information conveyed**

Inquisitorial practices began in the 12th century, that is rather late compared to the emergence of the first medieval heresies, which, being one with the social revolts, fell under the responsibility of the local feudal lords with their armed forces. For Christianity, preaching had been a privileged form of transmitting information and in the hands of charismatic heretics it was a sharp weapon. The Crusades had produced preachers more than they had produced Crusaders, and with this criterion of evaluation the Church did not consider it useful to give itself a specific propaganda institute, a term which, moreover, did not yet exist. Things changed dramatically with the Protestant Reformation, as the situation on the ground could have become catastrophic. The Counter-Reformation was a huge effort to block the catastrophe, and the main tool was the communication of "oriented" information. All art was directed to the purpose as part of a general mobilization. It was a partly desired and partly spontaneous phenomenon. Artists obviously had to earn their keep by pleasing clients, and there was no doubt that the Church was still by far the main one. But all of society was mobilized in this direction, so its artists willingly produced the largest, most lively display ever seen of saints, angels and divine figures in tangles of clouds and drapery. All with their eyes appropriately turned to Heaven, the ecstatic expression of someone who has just won the ticket to Paradise.

The establishment of an institute created specifically to spread Christianity throughout the world could not be missing. It is the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, the first formal structure created specifically to manage communication aimed at making proselytes (orientation, evangelization, missionary work). We are in 1622, but the need

to know the countries and peoples to be converted is much older: in the footsteps of Marco Polo, in the 14th century the Franciscan Giovanni da Montecorvino, for example, undertook an evangelizing expedition to China. The great country had been an objective of the Church for centuries, and this interest was to produce important figures such as the Jesuit Matteo Ricci, a missionary, but also scientist and cartographer, guest of the emperor Ming. And since for this activity manuals would have been needed to thoroughly inform those who would carry it out, the Church produced detailed handbooks, real treatises of what today would be called ethnology or cultural anthropology (see the *History of the Company of Jesus*, by Daniello Bartoli, an immense project, only partially completed, on the history of all the countries of the world and on the life of their populations through the presence of the Jesuits). Information, and it was inevitable that it would happen, allied itself with colonialism.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of communication through sacred texts, the Protestants beat the Roman Church by translating into national languages and being the first to disseminate the Bible, a key text for evangelization. The Church was caught off guard and, unable to suddenly give up the monopoly on the reading of the sacred texts, kept them in Latin. Luther translated the Bible into German in 1534, Olivetan into French in 1535, Diodati into Italian in 1607, King James into English in 1611. Even if there were earlier translations, they were not accessible before the invention of publishing and therefore the sudden availability was shocking: once filtered by priests, now the Bible became accessible to anyone who wanted to interpret it. In Italy the translation of Diodati circulated among Catholics despite the pope's wrath. Among other things, it was much appreciated from a literary point of view.<sup>27</sup>

The upheaval that allowed the monopoly of the Church to be broken was caused not so much by the invention of the press (even Gutenberg, in 1450, had printed a Bible in Latin) but rather by its organization for mass publication (Manutius, 1490). We had seen the evolution of the graphic language which had allowed information to be spread one to many, a true revolution. Now the press, and especially publishing, allowed the diffusion of the most disparate knowledge on an unprecedented scale, and control became problematic for the Church. What could not be printed in Italy was printed elsewhere, information had its revenge and the Church had to adapt: it was no longer like in the past, when quasi-heresies were submerged by the apparatus and recovered: now anyone who had something to say and a little money could communicate with any number of readers. Worse than ever, chains of readers were formed who subscribed to print a certain text that would otherwise have remained unpublished.

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<sup>26</sup> Daniello Bartoli, *China*, Bompiani; *Missione al Gran Mogòr*, Salerno Editrice; *Japan - History of the Society of Jesus*, Spirals.

<sup>27</sup> A curiosity: in the Florence meeting on the theory of knowledge Amadeo Bordiga uses the Diodati Bible by reading some passages (see this magazine #15-16 of 2004).

# Today

## A revolution in a hurry

Between the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque era, the history of the middle class social form, the feudal one, changes. In Italy, France and England, capitalism has already established itself as a new mode of production and only the now rotting political shell of the feudal class still in power survives. While merchants and industrialists dedicated themselves to the accumulation of capital, some representatives of the urban petty bourgeoisie, of the agrarian nobility and of the clergy, gathered the impulses that were in the air and took it upon themselves to give them the dignity of theory. This movement will represent the basis for the ideology of the nascent social form. The signs were consolidated especially in the second half of the 1600s, with the affirmation of a philosophical and scientific positivism, heir of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, Bacon, which in Italy, due to the Inquisition, "specialized" in experimental science so as not to engage in dangerous excursions into the philosophy of nature.<sup>28</sup>

Religious oppression in the field of research was objectively holding back the development of science and needed to be removed. The way to demolish the obstacles could only be that of information. Also in this case, absolutely impersonal forces were at play which found their "agents" in elements capable of dedicating themselves to cyclopean dissemination undertakings. The first attempt to collect all human knowledge in a single publication was made in Venice by Vincenzo Maria Coronelli. Franciscan friar, geographer and cartographer, began in 1701, not by chance in the homeland of Manutius, the creation of a *universal sacred-profane library*, which should have contained 300,000 entries in 45 large volumes of approximately 700 pages. The amount of work proved to be beyond the promoters' strength and the work was abandoned in 1706 at the seventh volume, thirty-two thousandth entry.<sup>29</sup> Instead, an English encyclopedia, edited by Ephraim Chambers, was successful and was published in 1728 in two volumes. Very agile (the biographical, historical and geographical entries were missing) and inexpensive, it was very carefully compiled, so much so that it was considered a model.

Evidently, however, these attempts did not completely respond to the needs of the revolution that his Manifesto demanded. Which began to take shape in France, where the revolution would explode, dragging the whole of Europe with it. This Manifesto was, in fact, the product of a chain of interests that gathered consensus and money for the printing of a *summa* of the knowledge of the time, revisited according to the new productive, scientific, progressive ideology. The result was not a simple *encyclopedia* edited by some wise man but a grandiose collective work that collected the knowledge of the world, and which was rightly compared to a powerful ideological artillery aimed at the

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<sup>28</sup> Mindful of what had happened to Giordano Bruno, Paolo Sarpi and Galileo Galilei, scientists such as Algarotti, Bellini, Borelli, Cassini, Magalotti, Malpighi, Montanari, Morgagni, Redi, Torricelli, were forced to work almost in the shadows and indeed, to avoid risks, to seek support among the Church's hierarchies.

<sup>29</sup> The work can be downloaded for free on Google Books.

*ancien régime* to overthrow it. And he did not mystify his intentions: the *Discours préliminaire*, written by d'Alembert, tore to pieces metaphysics, mysticism, man-nature dualism, religion as a source of knowledge, the difference between the productive and humanistic arts (Diderot intentionally wrote many entries on professions), in short, everything on which the old society was based.<sup>30</sup>

It was almost a historical absurdity: the previous revolutions had been hatched for a long time in the bed of the old society, they had established themselves and had reached the pinnacle of their theory, the maximum ability to use information to maintain power, little by little time, until the moment they entered decline. Instead, the class that represented this latest revolution was in a hurry, as much in a hurry as the capital that was eager to be invested. This class was producing its own complete manifesto *before* even seeing the revolutionary rupture, the seizure of power, on the horizon. The forces of the past, the king of France, the pope, the Jesuits, attempted on several occasions to block the project, but it found its supporters, subtly, precisely in some representatives of the old society: the powerful favorite of the king, the magistrate responsible for the royal library and censorship, even Catherine of Russia who purchased Diderot's library and left it to her to use.

The first step of the bourgeois revolution, therefore, was to publish its own program in order to communicate to the world that from that moment on the information collected and transmitted would be functional to the society of reason, of freedom and above all of production according to criteria scientific. The material world is simplified: everything that is produced is art; everything that goes into producing it is science; Diderot says:

"The industry of man applied to the production of nature, for his needs, his luxury, his amusement or his curiosity, etc., has given rise to the sciences and arts... If the object is to be executed, the set and the technical arrangement of the rules according to which it is carried out are called art. If the object is considered only from different aspects, the set and the technical arrangement of the observations relating to this object are called science."<sup>31</sup>

The bourgeoisie is a strange class: ideologically it is as if it were born intelligent and mature and then died stupid and infantile. Only the material path of production and its methods is consistent with the line of development of the social productive force. And naturally, as a consequence, so is the evolution of the information system. A highly mechanized society has a vital need for technical and scientific knowledge. The school of priests is not up to par, prisoner as it is of its archaic cognitive schemes. Therefore, after having waged a war against the remnants of the old society, the revolution immediately takes on the task of creating a system capable of teaching useful, *polytechnic knowledge*

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<sup>30</sup> The Encyclopédie is on the Web: <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/content/browse>

<sup>31</sup> Denis Diderot, entry *Art*. See also entry *Industry* curiously divided into two parts, one, inspired by the physiocrat Quesnay, on the *metaphysical conception*; the other by the encyclopedist Jaucourt, classified as *Political Law and Commerce*, almost as if to compare two modes of production.

alongside that of an ideological nature. Information becomes secularized, symbolic places of the obscurantist religion are sold or razed to the ground (such as the immense Cluny Abbey), the registers of men and lands are taken away from the Church. Even cemeteries are removed from ecclesiastical management. Obviously already with Napoleon - initially seen by the priests as a demon - the conservative function of the Church was restored and the demon signed a Concordat, but in the meantime the substantial cancellation of the old society proceeded quickly.

## **The state and the fabrication of facts**

Information is guaranteed by the multiplication of gazettes and assemblies, where the stage replaces the pulpit and the orator the preacher; and is collected by a police apparatus perfected to the point of being above the state, still influenced by personalistic impulses. On the occasion of the political assassination of the Duke of Enghien, the phrase: *"it's worse than a crime, it's a mistake"* is attributed to Foreign Minister Talleyrand (some sources say Fouché, to the Interior), in criticism of Napoleon's actions. A judgment that says a lot about the disposition of the new bourgeois state towards the population. A monarch can afford assassination, but after the anti-monarchical revolution the emperor cannot behave like a monarch, power has new and improved tools at its disposal to avoid making mistakes. And there is no error only when the population shows consensus. Aside from the obvious uselessness of the order, the mistake consisted in killing Enghien without *preparing* the consensus of the people.

*Later*, it was understood that the monarch Napoleon actually had consent, because the murder had no significant consequences. Moreover, we know, still talking about Napoleon, that millions of soldiers cannot be sent to the slaughterhouse by force alone. It is a fact that the soldiers cheered "their" leader without anyone forcing them, while, overall, three million of them were killed. In history this has happened other times, from Alexander to Frederick of Prussia, but with the bourgeois revolution it is at least contradictory: a great victorious revolt against French and European dynastic absolutism which leads to the creation of a new imperial dynasty, moreover with the cheering soldiers: it means that the mass of men can be mobilized in direct proportion to the quantity of suitable information that they can absorb. The "Enghien question" had to be treated taking these parameters into account. That they should have known each other *first*. And a police state serves the purpose. Fouché embodied this perfectly, and in the following years he made sure to have the "parameters" under control. Between loyalty and betrayal, he served power, was removed from it several times and always returned to serve it in total ambiguity. But under his ministry information became an active instrument of consensus or terror. The Jacobins experienced it first hand. Fouché had been one of them; friend of Robespierre, betrayed him by switching to the side of Thermidor. Under Napoleon he treated them ambiguously, exploiting them as those persecuted or tolerated. The ancient tendency to bend facts according to reasons of state to obtain useful information for approval, and therefore for stability, reached the dignity of a project. The politics of the police state, with Fouché, moved away from ancient

theatricality to approach the silent, discreet "engineering of consensus" in a modern and accomplished way.

The capitalist state, complex, powerful, expensive and inefficient as a service to the citizen (in the sense that it is the citizen who is at the service of the state) becomes efficient as regards its own preservation. That is, he becomes very skilled in collecting a lot of information, in using it, even in producing it with pre-packaged events; but to convey little of it, selected, obsessive, aimed at desired results. To the extent that the bourgeois revolution fuels the development of the press and the consequent proliferation of newspapers, the state perfects its control. Censorship was alive and well even during *the ancien régime*, but from time to time, at the discretion of the king or his dignitaries; but the new legislative canon introduces a standard regulation of the information machine. Control and the means to implement it, the controlled object and the entity that controls it develop together. It is clear that something changes, and not only technically, in the transition from carrier pigeons to the telegraph, from the network of visual signaling devices to the Internet. Information ends up in-forming itself and, as with many social characteristics, becomes autonomous. The process of autonomization involves the daily press in a spectacular way. The great success of news and opinions distributed daily, first in thousands and then in millions of copies, places unprecedented power in the hands of newspaper chains. The telegraph allows for an almost instantaneous connection and this affects news, especially those on which profit depends, such as stock prices. The teleprinter perfects the system, the telephone completes it.

The information *system* fits like a wedge between the productive structure and the ideological and political superstructure. In fact, on the one hand it produces profit, increases its productivity with machines, accesses credit, etc. as an industry; on the other hand it collects, manipulates and produces ideas. As a system it is ambiguous: advertising is at the same time a source of profit and a vehicle of manipulation; it is a commodity, but at the same time propaganda, it has the same function as the missionary who goes to convert peoples not touched by Grace.

## **The fourth and fifth powers**

The bourgeois revolution had established the principle of the separation of powers in a system within which they communicated without producing accumulation in anyone's hands. The great mystification of democracy also lies in this aspect: just as there is no need for the capitalist as an individual owner of capital to define a society as capitalist (there is state capitalism), so there is no need for "someone" that embodies bourgeois power to establish that this power exists. Having noted that the information system has become autonomous and influences the legislative, executive and judicial powers, it is even simplistic to continue to call it the "fourth estate" as in the Italianized title of the famous Orson Welles film. Being a *system*, it obeys systemic laws, that is, each part relates to the others and to the whole in an inextricable network of influences. Faced with a phenomenon of this magnitude it becomes even ridiculous to oppose the demand to limit its pervasiveness, not to fuel *lobbies*, not to manipulate so-called public opinion, to abstain from interfering in electoral campaigns or by God not to violate the "rights to



freedom of thought and opinion". Opinion is a commodity that goes on the market at a certain price. The only difference that distinguishes it from other goods is the fact that this price does not *directly depend* on the quantity of labor provided to produce it but on the effects it can have in the chain of influences within the system. And in any case the opinion does not fall from the sky, it is produced.

The intuition developed by Guy Débord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* would have been of very different power if it had been less "philosophical", and therefore more connected to the systemic aspect assumed by information in capitalist society.<sup>32</sup> To say that capitalism has reached such a stage of maturation that it becomes an image of itself and therefore a spectacle is correct and even nice, but very little explanatory from an empirical point of view. The so-called *fourth* estate - arbitrarily separated from the *fifth* which would be that of information and communication technologies - helps to understand well that the entertainment society is a theatrical image of itself as there no longer exists any separation of powers, if there ever was been, because life and its representation are one and the same. If Hollywood releases a film ( *Sex and Power* ) in which a fake war is unleashed to cover up the president's sexual pranks, and the direction of the war is entrusted to an old Hollywood scoundrel, it is clear that it is not just a question of a spectacularized society and not even an intertwining of reality and information. When the same things happen in real life that happen in films and vice versa, without it being possible to know what the priority is, that is, whether the film copies reality or anticipates it, it means that we are in a different dimension compared to spectacular reality or to the realistic show.<sup>33</sup>

"Reality arises in the spectacle, and the spectacle is real" , says Débord in the wake of Hegel. Such a sentence seems devoid of concrete meaning; but, reading that "*spectacle is the inversion of life*" , we get the idea that life and spectacle are two distinct manifestations of reality, albeit specular. In fact, the title of Débord's book recalls more a "society belonging to the spectacle" than a "spectacle-society", a bit like we say "capital society" instead of the more correct "capital-society". But Débord does not describe a society *of the spectacle* at all. We would be doing him a disservice if we took him literally. He doesn't want to write against a company in the hands of the media, Hollywood already does this. He poetically narrates about a society where "*the truth is a moment of the false*" . Phrases like this must be read exactly as we read contemporary poems: with great confidence that they want to say something, or by giving them the meaning that we are inclined to grasp in them. The capital company is fake, but transmits information as if it were true. Capital has long since freed itself from its owners, but it projects itself onto the universe with the myth of property. And so on.

To become all-encompassing, capital had *to* become independent from its owners, and this is what happened to information and its communication. Nobody chose. In *Citizen Kane* , Hearst-Kane, the real character and his double are nothing but flashbacks ,

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<sup>32</sup> Guy Débord, *The society of the spectacle* , Baldini & Castoldi.

<sup>33</sup> Just go to the Web and type some film titles as keywords: *Fourth Estate*, *Fifth Estate*, *Absolute Power*, *Second American Civil War* and from this first search obtain other keywords to navigate the sea of Hollywood cinema of denunciation.

the real protagonist is the film itself, created by means of an inexorable production cycle, just like the one needed to design and manufacture cars, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, etc. Capitalist society, therefore, is not "of" the spectacle: Hollywood teaches us that it is material production governed by scientific rules, production that pervades everything, which finalizes everything towards the valorization of the capital god. Taylor was one of his prophets: the factory is a system of integrated functions, it must be if it wants to function at its best. Internally, each operation depends on the previous one and has effects on the subsequent one. The flow seems sequential, but the flows are actually many, and they are interdependent since they converge in the creation of parts which in turn converge in the finished product. As long as this product does not leave the factory, as we have seen, it is not a commodity. But in capitalist society production is widespread, semi-finished products leave one factory to enter another, different flows of materials, money, information, energy, etc. they converge on the "finished product" after entering and exiting several factories.

Each of these flows represents a "processing phase". In the communist societies examined at the beginning, we saw that the entire cycle was organic, the society was highly informed and therefore not very dissipative. In capitalism the entire cycle, including material production, information, communication, self-regulation and formation of ideas consistent with the goal, has become involved in a deadly contradiction which prevents it from being organic, from producing order instead of anarchy, from transforming its great *local* project capacity into *global* project capacity: we are capable of creating ultra-technological machines, but we are worse than chimpanzees in planning our tomorrow as a species. On the other hand, we have succeeded in the great feat of reaching the maximum ratio between social production and private appropriation!

## **Information and communication as means of production**

The manufacturing cycle, leaving the factory, has co-opted everything needed for the survival of capital. If we push the laws of capitalist production to the limit and imagine an abstract scenario, where exclusively proletarians and capitalists act, it is clear that the entire society is divided between two groups: on the one hand everything that serves for the reproduction of the proletarians, on the other, everything needed for the reproduction of capitalists. There are no other spheres into which society can be divided. Therefore it is correct to include in the sphere of capital all the varied paraphernalia of information-communication, everything that is a social support useful for the survival of capitalism. After all, Marx also does this:

*"Since, with the development of the real submission of labor to capital and therefore of the specifically capitalist mode of production, the true functionary of the total labor process is not the individual worker, but an increasingly socially combined labor force, and the different forces- cooperating workers who form the total productive machine participate in different ways in the immediate process of production of goods or better, here, of products - some working rather with the hand and some rather with the brain, some as director, engineer, technician etc., some as an overseer, some as a laborer or simply as a helper - a growing number of functions of the workforce are grouped together in the immediate concept of productive work, and a growing number of people who perform it in*

*the concept of productive workers, directly exploited by capital and subjected to its production and valorisation process, the collective worker that is the factory is considered, its combined activity is materially and directly realized in a total product, which is at the same time a total mass of goods, where it is It makes no difference whether the function of the individual worker, pure and simple member of the collective worker, is further or closer to manual work in the strict sense. But, on the other hand, the activity of this collective workforce is its immediate productive consumption by capital, it is the self-valorization of capital, the immediate production of surplus value; therefore, as we will see better later, immediate transformation of the same into capital.*"<sup>34</sup>

The fourth or fifth or umpteenth power have not developed to the extent that someone thought and designed them to better dominate the proletarian class. The result is certainly this, but it is clear that the evolution of social forms provides, especially in class ones, the appearance and development of a self-defense system. Those who appear to be protagonists, whether men or entities, are in reality extras who recite a script written by capital for its own "self-valorisation, immediate production of surplus value". In *Citizen Kane* the protagonist, Charles Foster Kane, is dead. Research on his person revolves around him, research that is actually a description of ferocious American capitalism. More than a "complaint" film, it seems to us to be the masterful passport photo of a society: while the protagonist is psychoanalytically de-beaten, the structure of the film shows a grandiose example of information - newspapers - at the service of this society (there is also a hint of productive madness, a castle full of boxed junk).

With all due respect to scholars such as Herman<sup>35</sup>, Castells<sup>36</sup>, Chomsky<sup>37</sup>, and others, the information sphere is not just propaganda aimed at manufacturing consensus, nor a simple battlefield on which the struggle takes place for power. Information effectively structures power and is obviously a class weapon, but it comes closer to the aforementioned consensus engineering which assimilates it to one of the means of production available to the worker as a whole. This nature of its is more harmful for the proletariat than a simple fact of propaganda; but we must remember that every conservation tool has often become an instrument of revolution, both negatively, in the sense that it has provoked reactions against the *status quo*, and positively, in the sense that elements of this society have become useful tools for the transition towards the new one. We have seen, for example, that in production/distribution societies organic centralism served as a springboard for the emergence of the state, a useful structure for the subsequent society. In ancient-classical Roman society the army had preserved ancient internal relations dating back to the noble system, and they were inherited from the barbarians, becoming the basis for the system of feudal dependence. In feudal society, international trade, specialized artisan production and large-scale manufacturing marked the end of corporations and the emergence of capitalism. Finally today, in overripe capitalism, social production has reached such an advanced stage that

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<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *unpublished Chapter VI*, La Nuova Italia.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky, *The factory of consensus: the political economy of the mass media*, Mondadori.

<sup>36</sup> Manuel Castells, *Communication and power*, Bocconi University Editions.

<sup>37</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions. Mass media and democracy*, Elèuthera.

the entire society is more than ready for communism. The same criteria apply to information and communication: the technological instrumentation alone is at such a point of development that it will be immediately useful to the new society, especially in the transition phase, when it will turn against the current users.

The champions of wounded democracy know very well that so-called propaganda is now the object of study in the context of military doctrines. They also know equally well that today what is at stake is not a crude approach like those of the past (the techniques, advanced for the time, used by fascism and Nazism are textbook), but rather something deeper, relevant to democracy, but which has its material roots in the equivalence between exchange values reflected in ideology. The bourgeoisie does not need to "control the media": they are for free sale on the market like any other commodity, and moreover they produce, sell or buy goods. Even in the case of public property, they are parceled out by the parties, and the news teaches us that rivers of money flow behind the political parcellings, rather than ideology. The war of position within the meanders of the state is a model for the wars waged: the war to *defend* against Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction cost 3,000 billion dollars, which are added to those - the same order of magnitude - that they served to maintain Israel for sixty years by pretending that it was a local power that must *defend itself*. With that sum you can buy a dozen times the GDPs of Iraq and Israel combined, but the war is naturally *humanitarian*, it is *healthy* for the good of the Middle East. It doesn't matter that it is automatically linked to the economy by the overwhelming procurement system, from private armies to *embedded NGOs*. The all-encompassing information that must make one digest these spectacular logical reversals is closely connected to the 800 military bases whose network goes around the world, bases in turn heirs of the *nation building system* including the Marshall Plan and the USIS (United States Information Services), whose postwar propaganda films circulated in schools as *Western films* circulated in theaters. Cannon, dollar and book had not only built nations, whether victorious or defeated, they had built an "informed system" functional to the planetary domination of capital. We said in commenting on the repression and torture in Iraq:

*"Even the stones know that today governments do not fabricate the news but the facts that will be collected by the media as news... The fabricated reality becomes a way of being of politics, and more and more often events are studied at a table and implemented on the field to determine a desired scenario... Today, compellence is widely applied, i.e. the use of more or less sophisticated techniques to force the adversary to damage himself... The United States, by using techniques like this, continuously reproduces the scenario in the which the wolf, looking for a casus belli to eat the lamb, accuses him of clouding his water even though he is drinking downstream."*<sup>38</sup>

## **The proletariat cannot, nor can the class**

We have seen that once the tools have been formed, society can use them by devising new and more extensive fields of use. We are obviously interested in the extreme "alternative" way in which he can use them, to the limit of switching to another

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<sup>38</sup> See *n +1* n. 14 of 2004, *Nice work, Rummy!*

type of society. Information/communication does not escape these criteria, and the fact remains valid that the more society collects information internally to defend itself, the more it implements the Delphi motto "Know thyself". The primary requirement for the rapid development of communist society is the accumulation of a lot of knowledge in capitalist society; knowledge that will be overturned and from an element of conservation it will become an element of liberation. These are concepts that have already been touched on other times but which are useful to reiterate, because one of the most negative facts of the whole issue is a logical paradox whose resolution is fundamental.

When is society ready to implement a true engineering of consensus or in any case of scientific manipulation of information and communication? Obviously when sufficient mastery and diffusion of technical means and data processing methodologies is achieved and above all when a threat to its stability emerges from society itself. In other words, to put it in Débord's words, when all information, even technical information, is at the service of the entertainment society, indeed it identifies with it. Here the paradox arises: if within the totalizing society-spectacle I write about society-spectacle do I have the possibility of writing something that is not organic to the society itself? Or am I forced to use terms that cannot explain themselves? Let's see a typical Debordian proposition: "*The spectacle is capital at such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image*". Aesthetically appetizing, but again the sentence has no empirical content. Image capital? Is entertainment capital? The impression these sentences offer is that of a capitulation in the face of entertainment society. The book, read with neither poetic nor philosophical filters, seems like a *recital* of society-spectacle on itself. Débord follows his own personal, anti-Marxist trajectory, but there are quite a few groups of people around who, attracted in some way by Marxism, organize themselves, distance themselves from it, recompose themselves, often influenced by Stalinism, which they adopt in contempt of Marx, or who refuse influenced by the counter-revolutionary catastrophe it represented. Taken by too much zeal, everyone throws out the classic baby with the bathwater.

But what is this if not a bow to consensus engineering? Throwing away revolutionary theory – and there is only one – is a favor done to the bourgeoisie, as some would suggest. No one, we believe, can implement such a diabolical plan. However: if everything is spectacle, if everything is consumerism, if everything is the recovery of every subversive impulse, if the fight for immediate conditions only strengthens capitalism, if, as Pasolini also said, democratic consumerism is worse than fascism because *it involves* So what's the point of wasting time imagining that it's possible to break this monster of consensus? Aside from the fact that fascisms were no joke in terms of involvement, cultivating this kind of existential desperation means contributing to strengthening the monster itself. The *compellence* to deny, which goes hand in hand with the engineering of consensus, makes available a thousand treatises on consumerism, on the compulsive purchasing syndrome, on the diseases of abundance, on the neuroses of dissatisfaction, on suicides-homicides, on "life nonsense", etc. This company knows its flaws well, what it cannot do is find remedies. Falling into the trap and writing the thousand and first treatise on the flaws of capitalism may be a good

literary operation, but we are always at the level of lack of remedies. It means that the criticizer was led to use the same categories as the criticized.

Well, the explanation lies in the usual dominant ideology which is that of the ruling class. How do we get out of it if, in addition to ideology, the powerful means of dominating are also in the hands of the ruling class? The individual cannot do it, neither can the class as a sum of individuals. There's a deadly *bootstrap effect*.<sup>39</sup> To neutralize it, something is needed that is outside the capitalism-individuals-class ensemble, that is strongly anchored to the future society, that is a non-utopian interpreter but through the essays emerging already in this one. We are obviously talking about the *historic party*. The material condition on which the historic party relies is the lack of interests to be defended within this society by the proletariat. It is the material fact that this class is the *pillar* of this society but at the same time it is *something else*. The party does not carry out "counter-information" in competition with the informed society, the "campaigns of denunciation" that Lenin proposed no longer make sense in the era in which the bourgeoisie itself implements them. Alongside the thousand treaties we have mentioned, the informed society places another thousand which have as their object the waste of resources, sustainable development, the ruin of the environment, even quantitative decrease and the thermodynamic criticism of dissipation (entropy).

The historic party is not sensitive to adversary information, constructed or not, because it is not on that wavelength and its antennas receive according to other parameters. The party of the revolution takes note of the library of a thousand more thousand books, highlights the capitulations in the face of revolutionary theory, separates what is worth studying from the rubbish to be thrown away, but refuses to pose the question of power in "cultural" terms, information against information. His task is to create an anti-society by taking Marx's observation literally: workers come together to solve contingent problems and, in doing so, discover that the means has turned into the end. The objective becomes the community that recognizes itself as such. And what kind of revolutionary community would it be if it borrowed the methods of collective work, the language, the conception of the world from the enemy? The historic party cannot become a "formal party" on assumptions that are not already an integral part of future society.

## Tomorrow

### The company informed of the total capital

When we talk about information about today's society, whatever our intent, we must first of all realize that we are lifting a very small edge of the veil that covers the reality of electronic space. This reality, if we start from the time of its diffusion outside the narrow circle of technicians, is less than twenty years old. In such a short time it has swallowed up *all* the information in the world. It may be that there are some isolated

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<sup>39</sup> Literally: Lift yourself off the ground by pulling the laces of your boots. The term indicates the *processes* implemented when the computer is turned on so that it is able to implement *other processes*, starting from the operating system.

individuals who systematically still write with a pen, in some monastery there will certainly be ancient illuminated incunabula not yet scanned, there will be those who jealously hold paper libraries or collections of rare stamps, but *all* the shared information, what is needed for *any ongoing activity* now passes through cyberspace. Not all the books in the world, present and past, are in digital format, but all the paper books exchanged have passed through the internet, from when they were written and sent to the publisher to when they were distributed, sold, invoiced, etc. . Among other things, this is one of the proofs of how capitalist madness prevents the development of the social productive force: with a minimum expenditure of energy, a few thousand coordinated volunteers would have already digitized all the paper information existing in the world; but you can't: there is the *copyright* , the veto of the libraries, the title kept in the catalog for ownership reasons even if not available. Thus, persevering in the use of paper is accompanied by the need to send thousands of tons of books to waste because storage is expensive.

No one is able to know what *really* exists in cyberspace, much less able to control even a small part of it. The number of computers in operation, the total space occupied by data in the memories, the number of sites on the Internet, the number of documents and pages, all this is the subject of estimates, and the difference between the sources is such that it in itself denounces ignorance about it.<sup>40</sup> And we are talking about a sphere of human activity that is developing as never before in history for other spheres. Just think of the *business to business management activity* , that is, the one that keeps capitalism afloat, from mining to the mobilization of fictitious capital, from the production cycle of a factory to the agricultural one, from fishing to the supermarket network: it passes through the 100% from the Internet. Let's not talk about illegal, military and espionage activities. The CIA, which is only the best known of the American *intelligence agencies* , raised the alarm in a 2015 report about the danger of the situation: we (we the human species) are simply not able to keep under control what we have achieved :

"The expansion of information systems, news agencies and network connectivity, have produced an information *tsunami* that can overwhelm information management systems. The enormous flow of data impedes the production of *intelligence* such as processing capacity, which therefore cannot keep up with the production of data and news. Information alone, without analysis, is useless. Artificial intelligence and 'expert systems' can offer only a faint hope of a solution to this imminent information glut."<sup>41</sup>

An espionage agency has specific needs to satisfy and can resort to the massive use of neural networks that simulate the brain, or relational systems that classify topics,

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<sup>40</sup> An average of estimates suggests that 2.4 billion users can access around 500 billion documents, not counting those of the so-called *deep web*, i.e. those created on the spot by drawing on *databases* , limited access archives, various graphics, etc. . The most significant data, however, is that of annual traffic: according to Fastweb, 21 *exabytes* were exchanged in 2011, i.e.  $21 \times 10^{18}$  *byte* and by 2016 the *zettabyte will be exceeded* ( $10^{21}$  *bytes* ).

<sup>41</sup> CIA, Aris Pappas and Jams Simon, *The Intelligence Community: 2001-2015* . Downloadable from Home > library > center of the study of intelligence > CSI publications

filter etc.; it is a quantitative, brute force question regarding the number of employees and computing power. But the real problem is the total anarchy of the system, which tends to be a social brain but is held back by an intrinsically anarchic mode of production. In practice, cyberspace works because the individual networks, that of a factory, that of a newspaper, that of a party or of *free software developers*, function in themselves, with their managers, as networks within the network and generally do not have need to resort to "external" information. The interaction between "private" networks occurs through search engines that allow you to target a result, or through automatic classification *software that proposes series of addresses by analogy*. From this point of view, cyberspace is still far from being a true social brain, even if it is already developed enough to show its potential.

Potential that capitalism will never use, because as a mode of production based on private property it only needs what is inherent to said property, therefore to the chain of events that ultimately guarantees a profit. For this reason, a private network connected to the Internet is more than sufficient for *business needs*. Indeed, the larger the company is and deals with sensitive technologies, or has something to keep secret, the more it has an interest in locking down its business and computer-blinding anyone who tries to access it. In the end the Internet becomes a mass of islands closed in an open sea but very unreliable if not downright dangerous. A situation that is unfavorable for the development of the social brain, but favorable for the development of sophisticated consensus engineering techniques. As if to say that capitalism has incredibly advanced tools at its disposal but it uses them as Fouché would have used them two hundred years ago.

## **Power tested by Turing**

When we started writing this article, the first thing we thought about was finding a concise and at the same time explanatory title. "Information and power" seemed sufficiently synthetic to us even if not very explanatory, given that "power" is a rather vague term, but a brief search on the Web had shown us that there are two books, dozens of documents and several degree theses entitled to the same way. Plus all the variations. The impulse was to change, then we decided to adopt the title suggested 51,600 times by the work on the net.<sup>42</sup>

A good part of these documents date back to the period in which the press was the main source of information, followed closely by television, when the century of the "fourth estate" was underway. It seemed that the level of consensus engineering had reached its maximum with the press-radio-television trilogy, but in fact what happened next surpassed all imagination. Three years ago, a guy living in California started tweeting with a cat enthusiast living in Boston. This went on for a while, then it was discovered that the Bostonian didn't exist. It was *software* created by a New Zealand company to experiment with methods of infiltrating *social networks*. The *software* was called Web Ecology Project, but the name hid a very different origin: a study of the

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<sup>42</sup> Mauro Forno, *Information and power*, Laterza; Giovanni Bechelloni, *Information and power*, Officina Edizioni; etc.



communication techniques used during the "Arab Spring" in order to evaluate the possibilities of large-scale insider influence. During the experimentation, the New Zealand *software*, posing as a human (a kind of Turing test), gathered more than five hundred real *followers*, all passionate about domestic felines, and actively participated in initiatives on Twitter and on the Internet, presumably with the aim of influencing them. Now, we don't know what kind of influence can be achieved on cat stories, but we know what that experimentation applied to an insurrection is for.<sup>43</sup>

After the Arab Spring, the use of *social networks* became generalized in all cases of revolt, up to the clashes and occupations in Hong Kong (2014). The reason is obvious: a means that is practically free, easy to use and capable of instantly reaching and coordinating thousands or millions of people, makes it possible to reduce the power gap between the insurgents and the repressive apparatus of the state, re-establishing a certain symmetry. A few days after the discovery of the Web Ecology Project, the *hacker* group Anonymous successfully attacked a cybersecurity company that worked for the American government, taking, among other things, circulars from the US Air Force in favor of the creation of virtual identities on *social media network* to collect information on real people. In 2012, an American admiral, head of the United States European Command, was "used" via his fake official Facebook page to attract *followers*. This didn't last long, but it was enough to collect a mass of data and create a "cognitive network" by means of *tunnelling*, that is, the identification via *software* of friends of friends of friends, etc.: a graph that in many cases ended up corresponding to the organizational chart of military structures.<sup>44</sup>

These are curiosities on which we will not dwell too much, given that analogies and developments are easily deduced. The most interesting aspect is undoubtedly that of *symmetry*. While once a revolt was hopelessly poor in tools compared to those of the state, today the relationship tends to approach equality, at least as far as information is concerned. The anonymous group of Egyptian rebels who from time to time coordinated the waves of occupations of Tahrir Square carried out their task with similar effectiveness to that of the possible group of policemen commanded to boycott their success. First, because in those cases uncontrollable spontaneous concatenations come into play; second, because any overly blatant attempt at influence becomes counterproductive. When the social wave is for the occupation of the square, it is difficult for a *hashtag* to be taken seriously if it communicates the opposite.

At the time we gave a lot of importance to the UPS workers' struggle precisely because it was based on the creation of a supersymmetry with respect to information

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<sup>43</sup> See "The agent of influence", *Gnosis*, SISDE magazine, 8 July 2013.

<sup>44</sup> This is an elementary example that demonstrates how information, i.e. an ordered structure, can be extracted from a chaotic whole, i.e. from an apparent disordered non-structure. When the Bolshevik party took power, it discovered that the Okhrana, the tsarist secret police, had used a similar method: the names of citizens who were subversive or suspected of being subversive were written in several columns, in a haphazard manner, then joining the names with a line as contacts came to light. Finally, the networks that emerged were colored (the source is certainly Victor Serge, but we were unable to document it).

that the power still believed it had mastered. At the time, cell phones and GPS navigators were not widespread, but workers at UPS, a multinational transportation and delivery company, used them daily for work. Thus they managed to instantly coordinate flying pickets at road junctions and warehouses without the police and UPS knowing in advance where and when.

With Occupy Wall Street we have seen the maturation of another symmetry: the American movement, that is, the most powerful and industrialized country in the world, has shown the highest level of information, organization and technical coordination ever achieved so far, managing in this case too to displacing the police on several occasions, joining with the proletarian struggles even in very large contexts (for example the blockade of the West Coast). But the most important result, which went beyond what we mentioned when talking about Tahrir Square, was the movement's irreducibility to any compromise with power, identified in the symbolic formula of 1/99; formula that prevented political slip-ups of the type that were embryonic and immediately isolated, when branches of the movement sought an approach with the Democratic Party. This was the typical case of a *tom-tom* that was circulated online and immediately set aside because it was contrary to the spirit of the movement. It could very well have been an attempt to engineer consensus to bring the movement back into the realm of "politics", but it was defeated because it was simply allowed to fall. Whether it was a weakness of internal origin or an attempt at influence of external origin, that "indication" could not take root, because it was incompatible with the structure and program of the movement, that is, with its communication code.

## **Do things think?**

According to Denis Diderot, thought is only a question of sufficient complexity of matter. According to Giacomo Leopardi everything is matter, therefore everything thinks. Even according to Einstein, matter, energy and thought are equivalent. Obviously things don't "think" in the sense we normally give to the term. We have not yet managed to put together atoms of carbon, hydrogen and various elements to build molecular chains complex enough to self-organise, reproduce and give rise to that cognitive activity we call thought. And thank goodness, because capitalism is socially "good for nothing but capable of everything". However, we have already managed to establish an equivalence between matter = energy and to note that living matter is made with the same components as inorganic matter; therefore from a theoretical point of view there is the possibility of making matter think, also because we ourselves are thinking matter. What we can do at the moment is combine this thinking matter with the rest of matter in order to obtain machines. The computer is a machine, even if it does not have levers, gears and cams, but rather a memory on which data and procedures are written. Mechanical machine, data processing machine, and the brain of the man who came up with all this form an enhanced brain in an enhanced mechanical body. Descartes was wrong, we are not machines. But we manage to surround ourselves with machines connected to our brain. Individually we are a naked ape, an animal that is not very effective in physical combat against other animals; socially we are a completely different thing. Our symbiosis

with machines has given rise to a new species *Homo* . If most of us are disgusted with the result and would prefer to return to less technically wonderful times rather than continue like this, it is because this mode of production has succeeded in the absurd task of enslaving man to the machine, to its monstrous quantitative growth, to its energy hunger.

Things that we have said several times and which we briefly reiterate here because we need them to deal with the problem of information during this epochal phase transition. We have seen that the society of the original late communism, that of production/distribution, was the most efficient from the point of view of the energy *input-output relationship, and also the most effective in terms of information processing*. Now: what would happen if we created a communist model, developed with the same criteria as that identified in original communism, but with the technical-scientific knowledge of the new *Homo species* ?

Let's start from an elementary observation on the communist production/distribution society: its organic, centralized structure, with or without functional hierarchy (the archaeological remains officially classified as residences of power can be interpreted as coordinating centers not necessarily linked to the existence of classes) , and in harmony with the environment, demonstrates a "wisdom" matured over millennia. The definition *Homo sapiens is therefore correct* , because it refers to a species which, as we have seen, knows how to obtain abundant information from nature, knows how to transform it into production, storage and distribution through an extraordinary and effective control system based on unequivocal physical quantities. The dissolution of this type of society produced a qualitative leap in the social productive force, but caused the loss of the capacity for control and balance. Therefore, for at least three millennia our species has been "progressing", but in terms of harmony with nature it is not capable of "reversing practice", that is, of obtaining a desired social result; it then regresses to the Darwinian level. And this up to the highest level of capitalism, today's one, where everyone can see first-hand how great progress has led to zero harmony and the maximum level of anarchy, inequality, misery, hunger and war. Now, today's mechanized beast is anything but *Sapiens* . Someone suggests *Insipiens* and, translating as *Idiota* , it is quite close to reality. But we have seen that social power, that is, the basis for communism, grows, and that elements of future society are prefigured in an irreversible process, which remains memorized, so much so as to constitute a material force for the suppression of capitalism. So it is true that *Homo* in process is *Discens* , a learning animal. That same animal, which in our quick historical overview we saw come very close to the destruction of the planet, also produced its own antithesis: because it was able to dissolve everything, but not the "real movement that abolishes the present state of things". Movement that continuously produces and revitalizes the collective brain, the only one to learn without forgetting, to be able to define itself as a "party in its broad historical meaning" (Marx).

## Before things thought

Let's go back for a moment to the machine, the computer and the brain. In issue 34/2013 of this magazine we commented on the attempt to plan the Soviet economy in the 50s and 60s of the last century through the use of what were then supercomputers. Leaving aside the infamous Moscow retrograde capitalism, not yet even definable as "state capitalism"<sup>45</sup>, the idea that modern social complexity could be managed with computers, no matter how powerful, was wrong in principle. It was not a problem of machines but of information and its processing. The Soviets soon realized that the wonderful machines with their Nobel Prize-winning *software* were miserably defeated by the banal mafia bureaucracy of the party in power. Political interests prevented the collection of reliable data. Today we know, through sophisticated models and billions of times more powerful machines, that the failure of the Soviet project would have occurred everywhere. There was an error in theory.

In an organic system *no one* actually collects information. Each organ is continuously in relationship with the other, at every level, down to the individual cells. It is the organism as a whole that is informed about itself through a cybernetic mechanism of sensors that capture information and actuators that modify, if necessary, the environment or the conditions of relationships. Obviously we purposely used the terms *cybernetics*, *sensors*, *actuators*, as if we were talking about a cyber-organism. Of course, Descartes was wrong in comparing living beings to machines, but the artificial mix between the latter and the brain that designed them and the living society that uses them already functions in simulation of a living organism. This is scary, knowing that it is in the hands of a murderous economic-social system, completely inorganic like capitalism. But in the meantime it is like this, this cyber-organism exists.

Let's take information in the most common sense of the term: that communicated through the channels of the press, radio, television and networks. The press, that is, the paper support of information, from plantations to paper mills, from rotary presses to newsstands, is an anachronism that does not die out solely because capitalism has very strong inertia. On the one hand he is forced to introduce innovations, on the other he wastes them.<sup>46</sup> Thus it is a brake on the development of the social productive force. However, the newspapers are still there and fulfill their function. Since well before the film on *Citizen Kane was released*, print media chains have been owned by industrial or financial groups. There is an endless bibliography on journalism as history, as a school, as a social phenomenon, as a regulator of excesses and obviously as a tool for "consensus engineering". Today newspapers can be consulted on computers or other

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<sup>45</sup> True state capitalism occurs when we overcome the phase of state-controlled capital and move on to the phase of the state controlled by capital. The Communist Left called the Soviet hybrid "state industrialism."

<sup>46</sup> Current technology allows, if desired, a very high quality of goods, but it is evident that the consequent maximum duration is not convenient for the capitalist, who introduces right from the project, in agreement with his competitors, a limitation of the duration in relation to an optimal production price (planned obsolescence). An e-reader, which has no moving parts, which can contain hundreds of thousands of books and receive the newspaper every morning, theoretically has an unlimited life.

electronic media, both in abridged and complete editions. In the latter case we are faced with the unreasonable inability of the paper to die, with consequences on the upstream processing phases. For what interests us here, the living corpse of the newspaper has the same function both in paper format and in digital format: there is an editorial team, generally oriented according to internal alignments of the bourgeoisie, there is a production of articles based on news detected by networks of own observers or agencies, etc.: in short, there is a packaged product that you buy, read as it is and throw away. No cybernetic interaction between sensors and actuators. No *feedback*, despite some attempts in this regard. Even the comments sections do not represent a real interaction but simply a mini-tribune from which the individual communicates his or her very original opinion to the Universe.

Radio and television are not very different instruments from the newspaper, despite their incomparable technique. Born after the daily press, they differ from it due to the different way of using it and above all due to the different quantitative distribution between news and entertainment. In any case, newspapers, radio and television were created to spread previously written messages, in a one-to-many and absolutely one-way manner. From this point of view they are not too different communication tools from the code of Hammurabi, from the walls of the temples with the deeds of Ramesses II or from the deeds handed down to posterity by Augustus. Television, which stimulates the audio-visual senses and forces immobility, is particularly suitable for standardizing users as it numbs the ability to react. It is not for nothing that sociological and even medical literature has focused on the effects, which are so well known that there is no need to examine them again here.

The Internet represents a complete collection of the methodologies described above plus something else that we will see in a moment. We must first specify what the tool with which we access the network is. As it is now, the computer can not be connected to the Internet and still function very well as an "informed" machine. In the sense that it is a warehouse of contents, everything can be loaded into its memory, from newspaper articles to music, from films to books, from games to programs for designing machines or simulating real scenarios. As regards some of these materials, use is one-way exactly as in the cases listed above: a film will be seen as it is seen on television, a newspaper will be read on the screen instead of on paper, as well as other contents which can actually be duplicates from vehicles already seen. With one important, or rather substantial, difference: those who use the computer in a less superficial way than usual can give order to contents, insert them into relational lists, create hypertexts or directories *by topic*, manage images, combine work with leisure, etc. The computer is by nature an interactive machine. Perhaps this is why children, not yet ruined by their parents before school makes them completely deficient (Charles Fourier)<sup>47</sup> become familiar with it naturally while adults suffer. The computer is therefore a machine which, made to interact with us, extends our neurons into a field external to our organism but remains part of us, because we have filled its memories, we have ordered

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Fourier, *The new world of love*, Einaudi.

them. Today we live in a society that doesn't know what to do with this organic potential, but in the meantime the industry, just because it has to sell billions of machines, programs, peripherals and accessories, spreads artificial neurons everywhere.

It was obvious that sooner or later this mass of "personal" cells would connect into a network. All our discussions about collective intelligence would be ruined if the proliferation of elementary silicon intelligence cells had not connected sooner or later. Obviously we manufactured and connected them, with our carbon brain, but to connect objects together they need to be prearranged, instruments are needed to make an orchestra play... As Marx says, man does not he can do nothing but modify what he finds in nature. Edit and edit, get to have the phone. One is obviously useless, you need at least two for them to make sense. Why not a thousand? Thus, once the telephone was born, the telephone *network was immediately born*. By developing a potential, a new function is discovered. A thousand telephones cause total chaos on the cables, something must be invented that separates the signal from the noise. And it turns out that this something has relevance to a certain algebra which in turn has relevance to experiments in electronic calculation. A system has been set in motion which, from a certain level onwards, continues on its own, asking men to do what "he" does not yet know how to do. And its development proceeds according to exponential curves.

The diffusion, the refinement of contents, the quantity of information stored and conveyed are apparently astonishing, but the process, upon closer inspection, is completely natural. A system created to be interactive and function in a global network could not stop at the Proudhonian, local level, like a steam engine nailed to the workshop compared to the potentially ubiquitous electric one connected to the network. The "personal" computer could only be an intermediate step; before it imposed itself on the market it was already dead, because since the dawn of networks it had been at the service of collective activity. As a *workstation* it had considerable local power, but was best used when connected as a simple terminal to a shared centralized system, regardless of the physical location of the interlocutors, with no time lag between individual communications or actions. . Team *computing* , as it was called, was perfect for industrial design activity, an environment that had already shown interesting signs regarding cyberorganisms: man had begun by *producing* machines by means of machines and was now continuing with *designing* machines by means of machines; that is, he had managed to add a node to the network of the social brain, a synapse that regulated neurons. Anyone who does not realize that this is one of the proofs of the fact that the bourgeoisie could not even exist without continually *revolutionizing* its own mode of production cannot call himself a Marxist.<sup>48</sup> Yet Marx was fascinated, for example, by the fact that every factory had an internal workshop for the maintenance of machines and systems. He saw a profound meaning in this, because it was as if the factory were a self-repairing organism.

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<sup>48</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* . Complete works, Publishers reunited, vol. YOU.

Machines that design machines, that build them, that repair them, that relate them into a system, that control them. All connected to the human brain to give the system the intelligence that it does not yet have the possibility of developing on its own.

## How they think about things today

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has a Physics section run by the Things That Think Consortium. In the presentation of his site we read:

*"Things that think' began in 1995 with the aim of computationally unifying both environmental space and everyday objects. The Consortium includes world-renowned researchers, precursors of important emerging technologies, such as sensor networks, environmental information displays, biometric sensors, video streaming , multimedia indexing, RFID technologies<sup>49</sup> These projects, started at the Media Lab, are now at the forefront of a global trend, ubiquitous, pervasive and invisible... After achieving our original goal, we embarked on new explorations of equally exciting research topics, including emotional computing, organic networking between intelligent things, strictly personal interfaces, biomechatronics."<sup>50</sup>*

We don't realize it, but we are immersed in a sea of sensors and actuators. When we enter a supermarket, the least that can happen is that the product we purchased has an RFID device (it can be an invisible plate); placed in the cart, it immediately signals to the warehouse the need for a replacement and, if necessary, to review the stock. It can also, together with the foils inserted in the packaging of other products, communicate the composition of the shopping cart for statistical use etc.

A complex system such as a large distribution network that sources supplies directly from producers can monitor the entire chain, from raw material to finished product, from warehouse to checkout. A mega-network like Walmart, for example, which involves more than three million people in its production/distribution cycle and covers half the world, can automatically manage a complete system of detections, controls and provisions, in a true simulation of the organic metabolism (including, it goes without saying, the optimized exploitation of workers, which is not organic at all). The necessary computing power is no longer a problem, and in this way we jump into a completely different plane than the one in which the Soviet attempt was suffocated. Since there is no longer any need for human detectors, controllers and sorters of data, the system becomes self-sustainable, it works on its own. The example of Walmart is paradigmatic but not unique: even large car manufacturers work in the same way, making managers aware, in real time, of the stage at which the entire production process is at, from suppliers to consumers.

An RFID device is a basic detector, much less "intelligent" than a low-level personal computer. It's a bit like the Inca *quipu* , the information it communicates is: it is there, it isn't there, for each type of object it is combined with. But the same device, multiplied by a hundred and connected to different objects in different places, moving from one place

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<sup>49</sup> Radio-Frequency Identification.

<sup>50</sup> Things That Think Consortium, <http://ttd.media.mit.edu/vision/vision.html>

to another, offers a dynamic view of what is happening in the system. At this point data processing transforms a mere sum of stupid elements into an intelligent systemic aggregate. To the example of the *quipu* we add that of the *cretulae* and see how from the hyper-productivist madness of current society, after demolition of the old power, a harmonious society like the original one but complex on a planetary level can arise.

It is fashionable to be sensitive to the issue of *privacy* and machines that control actions and movements cause discussion. The problems inherent to these sensors/actuators are more of a psychological nature. Privacy for proletarians has never existed, in factories the guards have always checked how long a worker spent at the toilet, if he smoked, if he arrived late or if he went to wash a minute before the allowed time . Today these systems no longer exist, but there are others that are not seen. The control of complex systems is now the order of the day and, according to the designers themselves, it is a matter of making environmental detectors "educated", of increasing the reactivity of the systems, of making them increasingly *smart* , that is, more and more similar to organisms. living. We leave traces, we are monitored, our habits contribute to statistics sold like goods on the market. It is true. But for two thousand years Christians have been spilling their affairs to priests in confession, from Napoleon onwards every citizen of the world has been more or less meticulously registered by the police and in recent decades the majority of those who use a computer do so without or almost no protection. . Really, it's not a strip of foil on the cookie jar that ruins us.

In MIT parlance, "things that think" are called "augmented objects," meaning they have something extra. This is only correct if they are related to each other, because for example the mentioned RFID element accompanies the object and in itself adds nothing to it. Only with other objects that circulate in a monitored environment do they "increase" their capacity for self-organization. The same goes for our bodies. We can laugh or cry, no one on the street pays attention. But if an optical sensor can read emotions from facial expressions and compare millions of readings, perhaps cross-referenced with other data, then indications that are not only technical but useful for mass control can be drawn. Obviously not in the sense that governments care whether someone is happy or angry, but it is certain that it is useful for the police to know the mood of ten thousand demonstrators in order to predict possible consequences.<sup>51</sup>

So far we are in the field of collecting technical data to make more or less complex systems work, but it is not difficult to imagine, scrolling through the amount of data available on the Internet, what the nature of the social investigation work conducted with the new means is. . The detection of emotional data is already significant. The MIT *statement* continues :

*"As we move forward into the new millennium, the vision of 'Things that Think' evolves to embrace situations in which great computational capacity is used in the service of important human priorities, such as increasing creativity and productivity, the ability to health control, improvement in the field of safety and well-being, in increasing interactivity*

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<sup>51</sup> Facial expression recognition exists, we don't know if the police use it.



*in training. At the same time, we will continue to innovate in the field of tools and technologies capable of activating interactivity at the deepest human level.*"<sup>52</sup>

## **How they will think about things tomorrow**

We are clearly at the advent of a self-organizing system, for now in order to self-preserve, but rapidly evolving towards overcoming this unbearable stalemate. Access to widespread information must have its mirror effect in the widespread production of information. The so-called "things that think", as we have seen, allow the creation of elementary systems capable of knowing themselves. To function on a social scale they need a large amount of data and therefore a large processing capacity, which means large calculation capacity and adequate programs ( *software* ). They must be adaptive systems, i.e. capable of learning on their own based on the collection and processing of data. At this point we don't just have "things that think" but "systems that think". We are at the beginning and the result may be chaos instead of order: it is true that capitalism is inherently anarchic and entropic (tending towards disorder), but it is still objectively difficult to integrate adaptive systems into the universal network, the GPS satellite network , to that of mobile phones, and then radio, television, railways, motorways, air fleets, seaports, post offices, banks, public and private networks. There would be reason to despair about the possibility and feasibility of an organic new society. But it is an unfounded pessimism: in reality already in the 1950s the Communist Left demonstrated, with a formidable study on capitalist waste, that overcoming the law of value will free the human species from a terrible burden, as burdensome as it is useless: waste.<sup>53</sup> Not what strikes us most immediately, that is, the excess of thrown away production, the exasperation of disposable products, the planned obsolescence of goods. The *enormous* waste is that due to value management, the share of social energy devoted to administration. Without money, the future society will reduce management effort to a minimum, so that the "things that think" will be part of *lean adaptive systems* , while society itself will have to figure out how to get rid of the inherited elephantine bureaucratic systems.

There is no need to spend many words, for example, on the advantages that a society would gain from eliminating the banking system. And it is immediately visible how much vital energy is wasted in thousands of administrative and legal offices in factories and outside, including accountants, notaries, tax collectors, judges, lawyers. Projects concerning the integral automation of services such as supermarkets, car parks, taxi networks, show that almost all the sensors and actuators used, with related mechanisms, only serve to regulate three factors: the user (security), the goods (theft ) and the circulation of money (payments). As Henry Ford said about the spartan Model "T", "*Whatever isn't there doesn't break*". In the future society, the simplification of the system will be such that the collection and use of information will provide the immediate

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<sup>52</sup> MIT, Things That Think Consortium cit. See also Neil Gershenfeld, *When Things Begin to Think* . Garzanti.

<sup>53</sup> *Marxist economic science as a revolutionary program* . In digital format:  
<https://www.quintern.org/pubblicazioni/storici/scienzeconom.htm>

possibility of fully realizing and with little waste of energy what is only sketched out today.

The information system is placed within this scenario during the phase transition described in the Forlì program, in our case at the last point. Ford's maxim will also apply to the management of information and communication: if it isn't there it won't break. Which translated in our context means: there is no need for all the current paraphernalia to transmit and receive what we transmit and receive today. A fiber optic communication network can convey an enormous amount of data, and the Internet could easily replace radio, television, newspapers, cinema, books and everything that represents information today. The transformation is already underway, but at a slowness incompatible with the speed of development of technologies. The information can reside on the Internet which everyone can access by knowing what they want, searching for what they don't know, creating new contents, modifying existing ones, or accessing communities that help them to learn. A single device can do all this, with the advantage that, having eliminated radio, television and newspapers which transmit from one to many without the possibility of interaction, there is now one to one transmission with the possibility of interaction. Already today the standards for digital television theoretically allow unlimited interactivity, so unidirectionality is virtually dead, held up in vain by the limits of the service providers. Just as *social networks* exist, so there is a potential *social TV* (*pay per view*, *teletext*, *video on demand*, *telegames*), today relegated to niche consumption compared to the rage of traditional tele-drugs.

We can indulge ourselves on the topic keeping in mind that even in this case we would divide the plethora of absolutely redundant equipment by at least ten, replaced by a single system possibly connected with peripherals in the various environments. More importantly, instead of "submitting the information and entertainment system *to state control*", *the organization of the revolutionary society will make the entire information system interactive, supporting the tendency, already powerful today, to create new contents, to modify existing content, to enter the system instead of letting it flow over us.* Today the Internet war of states against other states or against rebellious populations is just beginning. Imagining that a state could be absent from the Internet is as absurd as imagining that the social struggle will be extinguished on the Internet, especially that for the input of information by individuals or organized forces. Just as there are *communities* that know everything about cats or chickens<sup>54</sup>, there are, and increasingly will be, states that intervene to obtain information and to leave it, in a constant and systematic patrol. The revolutionary state in phase transition will not be able to do without this type of activity and will certainly not be a neutral presence.

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<sup>54</sup> We have already mentioned a "specialized" activity around the cat, used for control experiments through the *network*; leaving aside improper uses, we are reminded of the monumental online work on chicken, *Summa gallicana*, which demonstrates how even on such a specific topic there can be those who, for fun or passion, provide the world with free information. There are thousands of sites that, with varying quality, offer knowledge, also forcing the user to develop a critical ability to discern between useful data and hoaxes.

## **Pravda, or Truth**

We have seen that in the revolutionary horizon of the 1950s, state control over information, as over other aspects of social activity, essentially meant "nationalization", that is, expropriation of private property in favor of public property. We have also seen that today the social and technical situation has evolved so much that state control can take place through the installation of "intelligent" systems capable of producing both self-control useful for production/distribution planning, and above all self-learning necessary to transform the anarchy of the old society into an adaptive, i.e. informed, i.e. organic system. The history of the most famous Russian newspaper can provide us with an opportunity to make a comparison between past and present, considering the present as a launching pad towards the future.

Pravda was founded on the initiative of a railway engineer in 1903, but was pushed into the limelight by the revolution of 1905. At the beginning it was a politically non-oriented newspaper, but after 1905 it was involved in the rising political ferment and became a battleground between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (Trotsky is director and steps away). In 1912 the Menshevik faction was expelled from the party and the newspaper automatically fell under Bolshevik control. In 1917, after a period of closure, it returned to the streets and, after October, it definitively became the official organ of the Russian Communist Party. Therefore we have a press organ that was born neutral, was swallowed up by the revolutionary process until it became the main voice as the organ of the party and finally suffered the fate of the latter. If there had been, radio and television would have suffered the same decisions, they would have been nationalized and immediately placed under the control of the party.

The process of the press in October could not be reproduced for today's media, in the capitalist West of the third millennium. Even if revolutionary forces acquired a newspaper following revolutionary uprisings, the heart of insurrectional information would not be paper, nor even radio waves, but the Internet and other types of networks. We know that revolutions condense decades into weeks or days: long articles in newspapers would give way to concise Twitter messages, and operational instructions, programmes, videos of the most disparate events would be available on the Internet updated in real time. During the uprisings of recent years, the *networks* have inexorably leveled the communication capabilities of all the forces in the field, virtually putting states, insurgents, the media, spies and those hiding at home on the same level. The state can obviously "turn off" the means of communication, ban alternative networks, arrest those who communicate, but we have already had proof on the ground: it doesn't work.

Pravda was therefore born neutral and was conquered by the political movement. For a long time the assault on the means of information and communication was vital to any uprising. Obviously in a revolt you take everything you can, but today's revolts have shown that it no longer makes sense to waste time occupying traditional information centers. Networks or, if these are blocked, other types of networks are more efficient. The Russian revolutionaries added to the legal newspaper a clandestine newspaper, Iskra,

which was printed abroad, brought illegally into Russia, distributed with difficulty, etc. Today none of this could hinder the action of a revolutionary force. However, even with the possession of traditional media, the phase immediately following the conquest of power will be characterized more than ever by the world of networks. The state will have no need to *nationalize* the press or even acquire a counterproductive monopoly on the Internet, which is difficult if not impossible to achieve. If the revolutionary singularity truly marks the end of an era, the network will already be largely in the hands of the forces that made the overthrow of the old society possible. The movements that have characterized recent years, from the so-called Arab Spring to the sensational social experiment of Occupy Wall Street, have waged a real information war on the Internet: their messages, films, demonstrations and images have become "viral", spreading like an epidemic. If the old state were forced to close communications it would simply decree its own end, because now the whole of society, as we have seen, functions through the Internet.

Therefore the new state will do nothing but release the immense potential of its troops by supporting their occupation of the networks to the maximum degree.<sup>55</sup> The revolutionary practice is overturned: it is no longer the state that must put information under control but it is the information conveyed by millions of people that monitors the state so that it does not go astray and dedicate itself to its own extinction. Is it finally the realization of direct democracy as anarchists and other worshipers of this bourgeois mystification dream? Not by chance: the principle of authority does not disappear, especially in a revolution, and it is represented by the party of the species. *Pravda* means Truth and the Russian news newspaper was called *Izvestia* , which means News. A Russian joke was: "In the Truth there is no News and in the News there is no Truth."

The Bolshevik Party had very early adopted the criterion of "consensus engineering" and therefore deserved the joke. The party of the future will not even be able to imagine using paper or television to communicate its program to the world in a *unidirectional way*; it will be, very realistically, an interpreter of real movement, therefore connected in "double direction" to vast groups of the species.

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<sup>55</sup> See *Occupy the World together* , n+1 n. 30 of 2011.