

Dionysian did not submit to the pure idea of beauty. The Bacchantes, roaming through the countryside, yelling, diabolical, tearing the living beings they came across to pieces, were not obliged to be 'beautiful'. Even then, it was not a matter of a rupture with daily life, but a return to cosmic forces ...

In and through music and dance, time becomes irreversible once again. The festival unfolds once more, headed towards its end, consuming what it draws its substance from: energy, desire, violence. At the heart of everyday positivity, the negative springs up in all its force.

6 Information Technology and Daily Life

For a long time, technological innovations in the domain of information (cybernetics) were principally applied to administration (administrative information processing). More recently, new technical progress and new economic processes have enabled – or, rather, dictated – their application to production. More precisely, the two applications are distinct and complementary. On the one hand, the processes of productive labour have changed, calling into question the old divisions of labour. On the other hand, computer scientists proclaim the generalization of their theoretical and practical knowledge to society as a whole. In contrast to the pessimism and nihilism, the apocalyptic prophesying that was still predominant among the intelligentsia only a little while ago, the optimistic prophecies of technicians and official circles have invaded the media and publishing.

This merits very serious consideration. Computer science and telematics are certainly going to alter social existence. They have already begun to do so. Communication has been an important – possibly essential – phenomenon in social practice since the beginning of history and prehistory. Will computer science, with its repercussions and related disciplines, go so far as to transform everyday life? To transform the social relations of production, reproduction and domination? That is the issue.

It is all the more significant and interesting in that the new technologies have arrived on time, if we may put it like that, in a kind of pleonasm. Grafting themselves on to it, they extend the process of 'formalization of daily life' referred to above. The increasing predominance of the abstract-concrete has already been analysed in its broad outline, without exhausting the theme (far from it). The abstract-concrete reigns in daily life, in place of the *concrete* (the human: each object and gesture having a meaning because they are practically bound up with a civilization) and the *abstract* (opposed to the concrete and distinct in the imaginary as well as ideology). How is this displacement to be characterized? We have seen how: by the world of exchange and commodities; by legality and the importance of impersonal, sovereign Law; by the value attributed to language and, more generally, to

signs. These priorities have been readily recognized by positive knowledge, since it recognizes its own instruments in them. Even so, this recognition has given rise to interpretations and superfluous commentary, with all social acts, including buying and consuming, being construed as the 'effects of signs'. This vast process creates the conditions of possibility for a massive use of new technologies. Supporters of these technologies, their theoreticians – or, rather, their apologists – go so far as to claim that they will constitute a new *mode of production* – the one revolutionaries dreamt of, but to be ushered in by a peaceful, silent revolution. Essentially, this mode of production would consist in the production of immaterial goods, supplanting the production of material products, as well as the ever more complete predominance of services over other activities.

Sign effects? Now is the time to grasp them, define them and appreciate their significance as well as their limits. Contrary to Jean Baudrillard, the point at which the social signification of objects entered into their evaluation – that is to say, exchange-value – was not the appropriate moment for a definition and conclusion.⁵ That was only one moment, one episode in a larger, ongoing process. Some theorizations characteristically extrapolate from a reality. They push the tendency inherent in this reality as far as it will go; this makes them worthy of note but, at the same time marks and dates them. In this fashion, we easily end up with a radical critique, but such a radicalism is absurd. Were each social act to respond to sign effects, it would sanction all the social relations conducive to this effect. The seemingly most insignificant objects would be the most active mediators. To eat a piece of bread would be to commune with all the labour and all the conditions of labour that went into the production of this foodstuff. Hence to accept them. Such a thesis is *true*, or at least correct, but it only serves to demonstrate unequivocally how a certain quest for truth can result in absurdity. Mirror effects! Language effects! Sign effects! So many effects that are exploited without searching for the real conditions of effects that are simultaneously both real and unreal. These conditions are discovered in the process that tends towards the abstract-concrete. This process never extends as far as pure abstraction, which would be equivalent to a vacuum and nothingness. It *nearly* gets there. But just as it is about to reach this extreme, the process is, as it were, put into reverse, reincarnated or reincorporated by daily life. Similarly, at the other extreme, it cannot vanish into the substantiality of the concrete and the real; it is returned to abstraction. May we not say the same to apologists for information technology? Nevertheless, it is certainly true that the advent of computer science, which is sweeping aside certain earlier ideologies, poses new problems that are planetary in scope. Must we choose between the terms of the alternative: computerization of society (from above), or socialization of information technology (from below)? Can this

contradiction be resolved?

A new ideology is looming on the horizon, which is no less disturbing than those that discovered a pretext, a provenance, or a point of impact in use and exchange, the two modalities of value. A text that might already seem distant, but nevertheless stands out – the Nora-Minc Report (1978) – was presented as strictly objective and scientific. It contained political suggestions and warnings, which were formulated and justified. It signalled various dangers: the role of global enterprises like IBM; brutal state intervention in information. At the same time, this text offered a model of society. Technocratic utopia? Sociological forecast? Both. According to this perspective or prospectus, the information society was inevitably going to be divided into three levels or sectors: (a) the kingly, that is to say, sovereign (royal) powers – those of the state and the head of state – controlling information, but also the energy as well as the foreign affairs of the country, and hence relations with global enterprises and the market; (b) the community sector, reconstructing group existence, and hence the social, which had been obliterated and overwhelmed by the long predominance of an economy producing material goods, as well as by abuses of state power; and (c) the competitive sector or level, given over to competition between individuals, enabling their selection in a constant struggle for places and posts in the hierarchy.

All in all, this report proposed a triadic or ternary (three-level) model of society, whereas other authors (André Gorz, etc.) made do with a bi-partite division (the dual society). Unwittingly, the authors of these various texts introduced the ‘homogeneity–fragmentation–hierarchy’ schema into their conception of things, while spontaneously trying to limit its damage. For other authors, information technology will lead to a sort of cultural revolution, rather than a political and social mutation. Some go so far as to claim that the state will accept not being the exclusive or dominant actor in the social game, withdrawing in favour of other, well-informed actors; and, in this fashion, will even wither away. These models are based on the hypothesis of a society constructed exclusively on the basis of positive knowledge, therewith implying the death of lived experience, or at least its reduction to the sign effects of information technology.

We must therefore examine these theories closely, and discover whether it is possible to end up in the total administration of daily life through the totalizing action of information technology; the total transparency of the entire society with the end of opacity in lived experience; the reduction of the activity of knowing to information technology; and so on.

(a) *Against unitary theory*

With information technology, must we not very clearly distinguish the scientific theory first of all, the technological applications next, and finally the marketing of appliances, their entry into social practice and their introduction into everyday life?

Scientifically, information is a quantity. It is measured. It is defined by a cost: how many signs must be used to transmit a message or a series of messages? How many operations are required to discover in a mass of objects the one corresponding to certain features that have been identified in advance? And so on. This yields a probability and can be expressed by a logarithmic function: H (unit of information, the Hartley) = $-\log_2 p$, where p refers to a probability of occurrence, that of an order of signs to the n th message. The quantity H is cancelled in a first borderline case, where all the messages are known in advance and are repeated purely and simply. Then redundancy, the inverse of H ($1/H$), is infinite. This same quantity – information – is maximal when there exist n messages that are completely different and, in addition, equally probable ($H = \log_2 N$). Then redundancy is minimal.

First comment: in the case of major redundancy, there is perfect intelligibility. It has already been noted that information theory demonstrates the identity of the intelligible and the redundant. This is of the utmost importance for understanding daily life and the role of repetition in the seeming clarity of the everyday. Redundancy eliminates the noise mixed up in the message; as for information, it involves surprise, and hence disorder. No differences would amount to dullness. By contrast, excessive difference kills meaning by preventing understanding – that is to say, decoding. Yet complete application of a code involves repetition in perfect intelligibility and, consequently, utter monotony.

A second, no less important comment: the mathematical formula above corresponds to that of energy and its dissipation – that is to say, to the theory of entropy. Information theory developed as thermodynamics. Since information comprises a disorder that involves a certain order, a dissipation (loss) of informational energy occurs through increased entropy. This seems to summon up a ‘negative entropy’ – that is to say, instants in which energy is revived and possibilities spring up – against the tendency to diminution. We glimpse a *dialectic* of information technology that envelops its *logic* – that is to say, identity, the repetitive, the redundant, the intelligible – by subjecting it to the clash between order and disorder. This aspect seems to have escaped the ideologues who graft their interpretations on to scientific theory and logic alone. Equally, we catch sight of a paradox of information ideology: basing a social order, and constructing a coherent model, on a theory that is in fact a theory of disorder. According to the proposed models, whence derive the sources of the disorder without which information technology cannot

operate, albeit with a risk of dissipation?

The theory has no right to want and claim to be unitary – that is to say, to cover the whole field of information, practice included. In the transition from mathematical theory to technologies, we have a first discontinuity. Technological application requires the construction of apparatuses, some of them material (channels, transmitters, receivers), others abstract (conventions, codes and decodes, systems). Software is distinct from hardware. In the transition from technological development to social use, to the production and marketing of hardware, we have a further discontinuity.

The press, whether specialist or not, has for some years now been full of descriptions of technical innovations: microprocessors, optical fibres, networks, and so on. Consequently, it is pointless to dwell at length on equipment and techniques. It is sufficient to distinguish between three levels: science, with an implicit or explicit logic; technological applications – that is to say, hardware; and social practice in its various forms – the treatment of information, software and its extensions – which sets out a different problematic. Any theory that eliminates these discontinuities becomes ideology. Moreover, there is no question of some absolute separation shielding practice from certain implications of the theory – in particular, the entropy of informational energy and the dissipation of information. As for the extension of information theory to other domains (notably biology), the same comments apply. A theory based on information that aims to be general, on the model of classical philosophies, blithely crosses frontiers and borders that are in fact clearly marked out. It may be brilliant, but any such endeavour is bound to misfire.

(b) *Information is a product*

This product derives from a determinate productive activity, whose result is consumed and disappears in the act of consumption. The question: ‘Does such a product abolish the difference between use-value and exchange-value? Does it inaugurate the reign of exchange in the pure state, without any material movement? Or, on the contrary, does it re-establish use-value?’ – this question poses the issue of information as a commodity that is bought and sold. Before we examine it, there is another question. The confusion between producer and creator, between creation and production, has already entailed many illusions and done a great deal of harm, especially in the domains of art and aesthetics. Some people regard the production of information as creation, conferring on it a privilege that is not warranted by critical analysis.

Historically, communication in general and information in particular possessed an undeniable creative capacity. Bold navigators, explorers, discoverers, including plunderers and pirates, established connections

between places and peoples that were oblivious of one another's existence. They did not 'transform' the world; they created it. Setting out from separate sites, they literally constructed the world by connecting them, constituting networks of maritime or terrestrial routes; they arrived at the world market. As we know, this world market has gone through two stages: the first predated industrial capitalism; the second came after it.

In this creative activity by means of communication, it was hard to distinguish violent pillaging and warlike enterprises of conquest from the peaceful exchange of goods – that is to say, products that were initially agricultural and artisanal, and subsequently industrial. The violence was only temporary; its enduring mark and effects are to be found in the networks. The result, however, was that exchange was a male preserve. Women were for a long time part of the goods, rather than agents in this creation, which initially unfolded at the level of inland seas – the Mediterranean and China seas – and then on an oceanic scale, before ending up as a planetary phenomenon. The violent, warlike form of relations came to terms with the logical form of exchange – the world of commodities – despite their opposite meanings; and possibly still does. Men stamped the world thereby created with their own imprint, even though reason – that of communication and exchange – was indifferent to violence, sex and location as such. Without their knowing it, through a mixture of struggles and logic, genetically and historically, warriors developed a relationship (to being? to the world? to nothingness?) in which bold, often brutal initiative, capable of the best and the worst, the supernatural and the humdrum, was allotted to them.

From navigation on seas and rivers, via railways and air transport, to the modern media, has the creative capacity of communication and information increased? There is no question that its productive capacity is growing. Yet it is as if production and creation varied inversely, the one declining while the other expands. Railways introduced more changes and novelties than motorways. This comes down to saying – a by now commonplace observation – that growth and development do not coincide. The product tends to predominate – not without environmental damage, as people say. Creation goes on declining and, in imperialism, production rediscovers its link with violence.

During this enormous lapse of time, extending from the first acts of exchange to modern industrialization and urbanization in a transnational framework, local life, rooted and confined to one spot, is preserved and affirmed in ignorance of the global, which is constituted elsewhere. The same applies to the everyday.

During this time, the creative capacity of communication and information is slowly but surely exhausted. With each new means of communication and information – for example, electricity (the 'electricity fairy!', 'electrification

plus soviets!'), and then the telephone, radio, television – people anticipate miracles: the transfiguration of daily life. As if it could come from a means or medium. These means or media can only transmit what existed prior to the mediating operation, or what occurs outside it. Today, communication *reflects* – nothing more, nothing less. What was the result of the multiplication of these means in ever more complex forms? Rather than a metamorphosis of daily life, what occurred was, on the contrary, the installation of daily life as such, determined, isolated, and then programmed. There ensued a privatization of the public and a publicizing of the private, in a constant exchange that mixes them without uniting them and separates them without discriminating between them; and this is still going on.

Should we deny all practical change as the media – that is, communications and information – have multiplied? Certainly not. But that is not the point. The issue is different: 'What is the meaning of this multiplication, this abundance of goods which are no longer material, and claim to be substitutes for traditional spirituality? Does it not in fact risk resulting in the destruction of meaning by signs? Where is it leading, to what new order? But whence will this new order originate? From what and from whom?'

McLuhan's thesis about the creative role of communications can be upheld as far as the oldest forms of communication are concerned – for example, navigation, the phonetic alphabet and printing. When it comes to recent products – the telephone or the car – it evokes very strong reservations indeed. To claim that the creative capacity of communications and information increases with their abundance is (a) a postulate; (b) which is contradicted by the history of time, space and social practice; (c) which is equally contradicted by the principle of the dissipation of energy, whether we are talking about heavy energies or subtle energies like information energy. To justify this facilely optimistic and rationalist thesis today, one would have to demonstrate the springing up in the modern world of possibilities that tend towards their own realization. Yet what we actually observe is that the increasing intensity of communications harbours the reinforcement of daily life, its consolidation and confinement. It also harbours a mounting danger of catastrophe. Is it not demagogic to support this thesis today? Does it not involve negating the negative such as it appears and manifests itself in society?

Information is produced. It is consumed. Information technology confirms the outmoded character of the classical Marxist contrast between base and superstructure. Information is not – or not merely – a superstructure, since it is an – exchangeable – product of certain relations of production. What was regarded as superstructural, like space and time, forms part of production, because it is a product that is bought and sold.

Whence the question: 'Who produces information? How? For whom? And

who consumes it?' This form of production is not exempt from the classical theses. On the contrary: it extends them. It involves labour and an organization of labour, production costs, an organic composition of capital, a surplus-value – that is to say, profits for those who are in charge of production. Nevertheless, it may be that the production and consumption of information deviates somewhat from certain classical rules or laws, disrupting them. Hardware, software, firmware – these do not have the same appearance. The processing of information differs from its production, yet forms part of it; the initial producer can inscribe it in its computerized activity – something IBM in particular does. As for databases, what precisely is their function and their place? To a certain extent, they are independent of information production, yet they are indispensable to it. Can they be counted on to operate in favour of a democratic management of information technology? Perhaps. But here another danger arises – the state monopoly of data, with the related risk of a global monopoly of information in a transnational system consolidated by this national monopoly. As a source of information, the database is, moreover, proximate to daily life. The consumption of information also occurs in the everyday. Enormous networks, channels, circuits thus start out from daily life, pass through various levels to the planetary (by means of satellites), and then return towards daily life. Whence problems which, some people maintain, have already been solved by technique or the economic and political powers; while others assert that solutions are still pending on account of their complexity, so that it is not too late to intervene.

Produced and consumed, information is sold and bought. It is therefore a commodity. Any commodity? No. It is not material; as we know, it possesses the peculiar characteristic of causing all other commodities to be bought and sold. This has always been the case – that is to say, since the existence of the exchange of marketable goods outside the gift and barter systems. It has always been necessary to know where a particular product is in order to go and find it, transport it, and finally hand it over in return for a determinable sum of money; and that knowledge derives from communication and information.

Information has always been as essential to exchange and markets as money and the quantification of products. Yet for many centuries, information as such did not appear on the market. Its appearance has a retroactive effect: it brings out the importance of information, as well as networks, channels and circuits, in the past. What is novel about the contemporary world is that there is a world market in information, which positively 'drives' the other markets, through advertising, propaganda, the transmission of positive knowledge, and so on. Is not information, the supreme commodity, also the ultimate commodity? Does it not complete the

great cycle of the commodity, its extraordinary expansion – in short, the realization of the world of commodities in that of the mode of production, in the global? There are grounds for thinking so.

Far from ushering in a new mode of production, information technology perfects the existing mode of production – capitalism and its world market – which exerts such pressure on ‘socialism’ that the latter struggles to escape it. In this way, the extraordinary shift – already referred to – of the concrete towards the abstract, and their combination in the abstract-concrete, is rounded off. This way of looking at things makes sense of the enormous circuit that goes from daily life to daily life via the global. The complexity of the world market, which is part of information technology because the latter implies it and marks it out, needs no further emphasis (a market in finished products, but also instruments of production, techniques, capital, energy, labour, signs and symbols, art works and, finally, information, which envelops the totality and constitutes it as global). Complexity does not betoken coherence and cohesion. Although it is aimed for, coherence is not thereby realized. Information technology can neither resolve nor cancel contradictions: it can only express them – or disguise them. The power of the world market does not suppress all resistance – the resistance of a number of countries, particularly the socialist countries – or inequalities, or conflicts between strategies. Hence this market is not established, stable, coherent, even though it possesses an internal, highly potent logic – that of the commodity as a system of equivalents. It tends to homogenize the world, and at the same time to fragment it, since it reflects the diverse origins and provenance of products, including information. As we know, homogeneity no more abolishes fragmentation than aiming for coherence suppresses contradictions.

If it is true that information technology presses the commodity to a conclusion, if it perfects and completes the world of commodities, what emerges from this is not something new. On the contrary: a world is coming to an end, in a slow but unyielding process. How can we get out of it? The crisis, as they say, is shaking the base and foundations as much as the superstructures. Hence the demand for something new, an inventive, radical opening: in particular, a different form of growth, intimately bound up with development.

(c) The Information Ideology

This ideology presents information in various ways that share the following feature: they do not advertise themselves as ideological, but as observations or positive knowledge. They also have this in common: they absolutize a feature of the ‘real’, rather than relativizing it and situating it. Here as

elsewhere, the operation which constructs ideology, and differs from those that launch, transmit or seek to realize it in practice, consists in the following: an individual or collective *subject* that is more or less uncertain of itself manages to raise an aspect or element of reality or intelligence to the status of definitive truth via discourse. This what happened with the historical, the economic, the political, structure, language, the imaginary, and so on. This operation is reproduced today with information. Thus, the irruption of the supreme commodity has been presented as an adventure, or even as the great 'human adventure', giving this product a romantic halo. We cannot fail to notice that around us, in persistent modernism, other – more adventurous – adventures are indicated: the exploration and exploitation of oceans, genetic engineering and the results of biology, energy problems, and so on. The notion of adventure can be seductive. But in the case of information, and even in the various other instances, it does not withstand examination. How can we ignore the fact that the economic powers (firms) and political powers (states) reserve the ocean depths for themselves, disputing them; that they explore space for the purpose of appropriating it; and that the same is true of information? This ancient Odyssean image – the adventure – can be demagogically exploited. Does it have a meaning? Yes: it applies to the whole human race which, having become planetary and global, does not know where it is headed and risks going where it has no wish to go – that is to say, towards the abyss.

Not only does information ideology not present itself as ideology, but it proposes either to put an end to ideologies or to transfer the ideological function to information apparatuses, including the production and diffusion of positive knowledge, which was formerly the prerogative of schools and universities. The reduction of positive knowledge to information would have consequences: the end of critical and conceptual thinking, and hence the end of all thinking, or its departure to take refuge in illegality and violence. All the more so given that information apparatuses are in great danger of being administratively and institutionally controlled either by the national state, or by transnational forces which would use this supplementary means to consolidate their order. Not only would positive knowledge be reduced to recorded and memorized facts, but everything concerning the political and politics would go through the channels of official information. This would create the greatest difficulties for any action independent of established power, and possibly result in the disappearance of all counter-power. Contradictions at this level (i.e. between states and firms) offer a last chance in a world that aims for coherence and stability, but falls short of them. Information ideology masks the dangers and the opportunities alike. Politics itself would be replaced by the discourse and ideology of the 'competent' – that is to say, technicians who can produce information and technocrats who

give them their orders. This tendency, which can already be observed, forms part of the crisis; it extends it, beyond ethical values and social norms, to political institutions and discourses. It might be thought that it favours the personalization of 'kingly' forms of power, as well as appeals for a new consensus around this personalized power. The paramount danger is this: the unchecked reinforcement of the state and its multiple capacities – in particular, that of seizing daily life in its organs of prehension and repressive comprehension.

Information ideology possesses the dubious merit of prophetically heralding the new society: post-industrial, post-capitalist and even post-socialist. Pre-industrial society was supposedly constituted regionally and territorially – that is to say, as is well known, around energy sources and raw materials. Industrial society proper was supposedly organized around the exploitation of energy forms freed from territorial constraints (electrical energy). As for post-industrial society, it is supposedly already being structured around information that is abstract, yet global and universal.⁶

This technological and technocratic utopia makes light of contradictions, old or new. It is true that recent technologies deploy and strengthen communication networks at the global level; and these thus tend to constitute a single network through the interconnection of national and regional networks, integrating multiple services. But at the same time, such globalization diversifies the network thereby constituted, which depends on sources, data banks, and so on.

Let us avoid making a Gothic novel, as well as a romance, out of information technology.⁷ Information ideologues assert that society and the social are being transformed, and that a qualitative leap is about to occur. They also believe that information technology is necessary and sufficient to establish new norms and values. Which ones? The end of opacity and impenetrability – and hence transparency! If we credit these ideologues, the information society will finally realize the Truth. Not in the manner of the philosophers, as thought and abstract system, but as reality and practical system. No more secrecy! Anything that happens, anything that supervenes, will immediately reverberate in the totality with all its details. In short, a universal game of mirrors, finally materialized! An effect of signs, finally totalized! No more shadows, no more dark corners or recesses in this pristine practice. This would be tantamount to the realization of philosophy – not by the working class and revolution, as Marx believed, but through technology. Information, together with its extensions, would lead by the shortest route to a fully planned society, in which the centre would constantly receive messages from each base cell, with the result that culture and information, positively identified, possessing the same structure, would render each individual fully conscious. Of what? Of general constraints!⁸ Hence we are

dealing not only – or not so much – with a technocratic utopia or ideology, but with a scientific mythology – a paradox, what is more, with the myth of an electronic Agora and the disturbing project of a technological extension of the ‘audit’ intended for the internal control of workshops, but capable of being extended to political and police control of spaces much vaster than the enterprise ...

These ideologues do not think that they are interpreting the techniques, but that they are estimating them objectively. They refuse to concede that they are presenting, or representing, a tendentious political project. To them, the project seems to follow logically from the technology. Is not technologizing the social and political, as opposed to socializing and politicizing technology, a choice and a decision? A political standpoint that presents itself as objective meaning? This line of questioning does not resolve the problem, but it does preclude accepting as a solution utterances that formulate the problem by distorting it, concealing the contradictions involved.

Those who flaunt the technicist perspective allow space and a function for base cells, for micro-societies and micro-decisions – in other words, for daily life. They simultaneously take it into account and abolish it. Information technology can reduce both knowledge and spontaneity. In this perspective, knowing no longer involves using concepts, but simply receiving and memorizing information. The concept is blurred – the concept of knowledge and knowledge by means of concepts. To all intents and purposes, concepts disappear in the face of the facts. Here we recognize a venerable philosophical debate being peremptorily resolved and terminated.

Yet information is lost. How is this dissipation to be resisted, if not by a project and an idea of knowledge? Take, for example, the affirmation of identity: it proclaims its persistence, its perseverance in being, its resistance to decline and difference alike. In this way, identity becomes abstract, fictive, unreal; in this way, it declines ...

The paradoxes, aporias and problems of information ideology are proliferating. If we accept the distinction between activity that produces material goods and activity that produces non-material goods, we may conclude that the second sector is bound to grow more rapidly than the first. Yet it tends thereby to choke and even paralyse it. Some theoreticians – and not the least prominent – have reached the point of forecasting a crisis of information technology, in a society that is already in a critical condition, and from which the ideology in question promised an escape. It is argued that the capacity of useful labour, producing material goods, will decline once the energy dissipated in the production of material goods rises to half of the power that is available and consumed globally. Hence there is a threshold.⁹ It is true that informational energy is a subtle energy, analogous to nervous

energy in comparison with the heavy energy of the muscles. But is there no such thing as nervous fatigue? Exhaustion and a physiological threshold in organisms?

This conjures up the possibility of a confrontation between the socio-political and the physiological or organic. According to contemporary biology, relational characteristics – that is to say, relative to the *other*, not simply to an impersonal environment – polarize living organisms and define the organic. So that pleasure and desire enter into the genetic programme, together with the many indices and signs of sexuality: olfactory, auditory, visual. Is there not a conflictual, dynamic relationship between these three terms: the rational, the relational or positional, the informational – a relationship that cannot be reduced to quantification?

It is nevertheless the case that information ideologues take the sum of techniques, apparatuses and applications for a unitary, objective knowledge, for an activity capable of affecting the whole of reality. They make information the higher form of positive knowledge, destined to absorb the lower forms. Yet for theory and knowledge, information technology can today be regarded solely as an element and a moment of the activity of knowledge, as yet undeveloped. Substituted for knowledge, information deletes thought and reduces positive knowledge to that which is amassed, accumulated, memorized without gaps, outside of lived experience. The negative disappears in a perfect positivity. Information ideology – or, rather, idealism, dressed up as positive knowledge and even technological materialism on occasion – acts as a factor of dislocation in the activity of knowledge, in the political, and in daily life.

For centuries, progress in communications and information has unquestionably favoured central power and central political control; this forms part of the lowering of creative capacity to which reference has already been made. What is at stake in computerization is determined thus. The die is not cast, but the dice are rolling on a planetary cloth. In France there are imminent dangers. The machinery of information apparatuses tends to reproduce the characteristics of the French political apparatus; it is statist and centralized.¹⁰

(d) *Introversion*

Computerized daily life risks assuming a form that certain ideologues find interesting and seductive: the individual atom or family molecule inside a bubble where the messages sent and received intersect. Users, who have lost the dignity of citizens now that they figure socially only as parties to services, would thus lose the social itself, and sociability. This would no longer be the existential isolation of the old individualism, but a solitude all the more

profound for being overwhelmed by messages. With all services at its disposal, ultimately, this individual atom or family molecule would no longer need to stir. Those analysts who have not renounced critical thinking have drawn attention to this danger. Some people have even looked to the state to ward it off. A pure dream: it is very difficult for state power not to favour a tendency that leaves the field open for it. What state and political authority can conceive of their own dissolution, and organize the conditions for it? State intervention inevitably drives 'users' to withdraw into their shells. Do not shells of this kind abandon individuals to anxiety, to an anguish bombarded by hubbub? Information ideologues hope that as long as the shell is filled with information, the individual will feel at home in it. Without any evidence, to say the least.

As for hopes for a reconstruction of a three-term unity – 'space-time-labour' – by means of information, they belong to abstract utopianism. Home-based, remote-controlled labour consummates the separation and fragmentation that are already under way. Rather than being surmounted, the schema 'homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchization' will get worse. Once, private life eluded the social. The new privatization will be invaded by the outside while paradoxically losing all capacity for externalization.

People talk about a new society. Would it not be more accurate to fear a new state, founded on the political use of information, ruling over a population enclosed in bubbles it has inflated, and in such a way that each mouth believes its bubble comes out of it?

Control of information will come neither from excessive centralization, a unitary structure ruling over the whole of society; nor from excessive decentralization, issuing in fragmentation and formlessness. It requires a project for society, avoiding facile solutions the most likely of which, alas, can already be glimpsed: centralized power negotiating a compromise with global enterprises. Paradoxically, control of information involves an intensification of surprise effects and a reduction in redundancy, without succumbing to disorder. Yet such effects can come only from below – on condition, moreover, that the active base does not disrupt the network. In the relatively near future, it is possible to imagine everyone ordering what they want, or being able to pay for things, without having to step outside. Will women prefer to go to the market or into shops, rather than tapping away at home on a keyboard? Possibly yes, possibly no: it is a decision for those at the base.

So there are better things to do than disconnecting informational structures into a multiplicity of levels, nets, cells. This thesis, which remains technocratic, is well intentioned and has the merit of technically demonstrating the advantages of a differential organization of space and time. In the case of a crash or attack, differentiated networks can be

substituted for one another. The differentiated structure foreseen by technicians does not extend to sanctioning the *autonomous* operation of partial centres; above all, it does not give the floor to those at the base. Hence it does not result in the introduction of *self-management* into information technology. These more flexible schemas foresee counter-powers, but only in order to 'balance' the real powers and decision-making centres without disturbing them. The question posed cannot be resolved solely by means of technique; it is *political*, and will remain so. In society as in art, technique is not an end but a means. A fundamental commonplace: everything depends on the way in which technique is used, who uses it, and for whom. Controlling information, if that is possible, requires accepting that the base – alveolus or cell – has an active life, an existence and a social form, and hence a capacity for self-determination. Here we re-encounter the general problematic of self-management, rendered somewhat more complex. The relations of self-managed units, enterprises or territories, are already in conflict with the market and the state. These conflictual relations interfere with the relations of these units to information technology. Will self-management be realized and actualized by acquiring a content and meaning in information technology? Or will technological and political pressures reduce self-management to a sham? That is the question. The coherence of human groups, such as the sociologist habitually defines them, is merely a fiction, except possibly in the case of a pressure group. In general, a social group has a concrete existence only if it seeks to control its conditions of existence, of living and surviving, and succeeds in so doing. This is how self-management is defined.

We have reached the stage of turning ideological definitions of information technology back round against them: information does not possess the quality, the capacity, of *conferring meaning* on that which does not possess it; or of restoring it to that which has lost it. On the contrary: information technology could well complete the destruction of meaning, by replacing value by signs, the totality by the combinatory, the living word by the message (in classical terms, the spirit by the letter). With the end of meaning, nothing would have meaning – information no more than anything else. (Would there still be anything else?) Where might a restoration, a rebounding, of meaning come from?

Information can no more create situations than it can create meaning. It can only transmit what is said about situations; it simulates or dissimulates situations, with their conflicts. From the standpoint of information itself, it is impossible not to call upon a source or resource, an eruption of surprises, a social negative entropy, violent or pacifying, innovative and creative. This capacity is discovered in the self-management, the self-determination, of effective centres of power, partially or utterly transgressing the order of

power. Here alone, thought and the desire to shatter codes and create new codes coincide. Foundational violence? No, creative transgression, beyond transitions, means and averages, media, modes and models.

Daily life sometimes seems like the thing of substance that prevents forms from vanishing into pure abstraction, approximating nothingness; and sometimes like the place from which the content might arise that will transform forms, including the supreme form: information.

Only daily life can attach to the sites of production and consumption what unites them, and yet tends to become detached from them: information. Hence we are dealing not with a duality, a binary system, or bi-polarity, but with a triadic relationship: production–creation–information.