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A LIQUID REVOLUTION: FOR A COMMUNITY WITHOUT MONEY, MANAGEMENT, AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION, A WE-CAN-DO-IT-OURSelves ECONOMY, A FOR-FREE ECONOMY

Jan Ritsema

Or why aren't we allowed to do nothing and still do, as WE CANNOT NOT DO? Or why can't we escape, or at least strongly reduce, the be-paid-for-work economy, the be-paid-too-little-for-selling-your-time economy?
—Jan Ritsema

We need an economy centered on sustainable abundance rather than scarcity. Fifty years from now our grandchildren may look at this mass-market employment with the same disbelieve with which we look upon slavery and serfdom. The idea that a human being's worth was measured almost exclusively by her or his productive output of goods, services, and material wealth will for our grandchildren seem ancient, even barbaric.

Despite thinking that we are free and liberated individuals, that we have the free will to navigate through the desert of desires we are swimming in, we still emphatically accept the only and 'free' choice that is offered to us, the one that is called 'free labor' in the paid-too-little-for-selling-your-time economy. This profit-oriented economy is managed not for the well-being of the living workforce, but, to the contrary, it is managed efficiently to be as profitable as possible for the dead invested Capital. We are well aware that we cannot live properly when we cannot pay our bills, so we have no other choice than to work.

We think that we are free and liberated individuals, however, practically, we are not. What counts is the practice, what counts are the facts. And the factual situation is that we have no choice. We are forced to work—not in the old-fashioned brutal way; not physically, like slaves—and we have lost, or, more accurately, we have given away, our independence, by putting our resources on sale. The main resources we had were the others: the family, the tribe, the commune, the communal, the common, and public space. We exchanged these for the emperor's new clothes by embracing the collective illusion of the free and liberated individual, who, yes, has the choice between fifty different flavors of chocolate and thirty of yogurt, but only when they can pay for it. And we, at least the majority of us who do not belong to the super-rich 1 percent, can only pay when we sell our time and space in the form of employment contracts. Having no choice equals what one could call a form of slavery, it is soft, but it is slavery nonetheless.

This slavery to which almost everybody surrenders her- or himself to is not self-evident, un-escalable, to be taken for granted, it's given! But we can undo ourselves from it, and without becoming slaves to ourselves—to that scheme into which neoliberal capitalism tries to maneuver us. I am talking here of the 24/7 economy that neoliberalism is careering toward, in which everybody is organizing their own time and space, in order to decide all by themselves when and where they will work. This sounds good, were it not that competition will be organized in such a way that people will work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with all of the benefits remaining with the ones who coordinate and manage the ever-renewing chain of products and services, aka the traffic of human and machinic activity. Artists seem to be the explorers, the guinea pigs, and the teasers for this new economy. They are the representatives of those people who are mastering their own time and space: this looks like paradise were it not that they occupy themselves continuously, seemingly free, barely paid, desperately writing applications, free and precarious.

This text proposes to elaborate on this situation in order to design a way out of this trap that we illusively stepped into from the beginning of the renaissance [sic], with its invention of banks, the stock exchange, the creation of cities, etc., through the industrial age, with its massive separation of labor and capital, which got us locked in the trap completely, to our days of cognitive and semi-capitalism that drives us into co-opting/enjoying life in a cage through the creation of an almost infinite amount of desires and fears. The resulting addiction to over-consumption renders inescapable the necessity to earn money to afford things or to sell future income as debt when one's current income is barely enough to pay for housing, food, communication, insurance, and transportation. A vicious cycle, yes, that, while circling around, creates as collateral damage a lot of waste and pollution, for which the trapped have to pay too. En-cage-d, yes, with ourselves and our defensive attitude toward others.

And this is not all. The gap between the 'haves' and the 'almost-have-nots' is growing. As Oxfam stated at the World Economic Forum held in 2014 in Davos, Switzerland in their report, 'Working for the Few':

— Almost half of the world's wealth is now owned by just one percent of the population.
— The wealth of the one percent richest people in the world amounts to $110 trillion.
— That's 65 times the total wealth of the bottom half of the world's population.

The bottom half of the world's population owns the same as the richest 85 people in the world.
Seven out of ten people live in countries where economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years. The richest one percent increased their share of income in 24 out of 26 countries for which we have data between 1980 and 2012.

In the US, the wealthiest one percent captured 95 percent of post-financial crisis growth since 2009, while the bottom 90 percent became poorer.¹

They (the 1%) make their money in financials on stock markets and derivative markets for which we have thus far been paying the bills by letting them use our capability to assume debt and pay taxes as the main raw material for the accumulation of financial assets. All this is embedded in a competitive culture of fear. Unmoored from our resources, we seem to be destined to remain under these conditions forever—despite knowing that we are conditioning these conditions (and not some system or power outside of ourselves), despite knowing that only we, we ourselves, can get ourselves out of this, we still feel unable to do so. We seem fundamentally separated from each other, individualized, and by way of this we have become forceless. These conditions seem bigger than us. Yes, we are trapped. We are slaves and we are trapped. How can we get out of here?

I think only intelligence can get us out of here, only a thorough understanding of the situation together with the creation of instruments that force us into other practices can shift us into a much kinder, less violent, post-capitalist society.

An intelligent global society will find a way out of being trapped in Capital. We can imagine kind alternatives, ones that can do without barbaric exploitation and usurpation. And we can do this without losing the high standards of living many of us cling to, without losing our capacity to realize and produce new inventions and imaginings.

For the near future, Atelier van Lieshout foresees the emergence of a new tribal world, a primitive society where production takes centre stage. This world will see a return to farming and industry – which currently both have been banished from our society – and the re-establishment of our relationship with materials – which now has been lost.

With New Tribal Labyrinth, Atelier van Lieshout wants to reinterpret and revalue the factories and installations of the Industrial Revolution. The atelier has created a series of large-scale sculptural/technical installations, made in an improvised style with contemporary materials...

In this new world, ethics will be of little importance. Instead, rituals will be re-valued, offering guidance to the tribes of the future. Atelier van Lieshout is anticipating this future, and is creating all necessary equipment for the imaginary tribes, ranging from items of worship and sacrifice to objects for daily use, such as dwellings and machines.

All these artworks together make up the huge Gesamtkunstwerk that is New Tribal Labyrinth.

...blast furnaces and foundries, refineries and chemical installations, textile mills and ceramics workshops.

At first sight, it is not immediately clear whether or not these installations are part of a post-apocalyptic survival strategy, or instead a representation of a new utopian way of honest, sustainable production.
Additionally, the atelier has created a series of Monuments to Machines, large-scale artworks in brightly coloured composite that pays homage to production, like totems, objects of worship even. One of these is the Steam Hammer. Once an example of technological achievement, it is now a stark reminder of obsolescence. The work is a monument to the industries of days gone by.

A massive, tactile, almost humanized sculpture serves as a dwelling, extended with a toilet and kitchen, housing the peoples of a new tribe in a post-industrial world. By appropriating its bowels, humans will literally become one with the machine.
New Tribal Labyrinth is a plea for production, whether it is through the re-evaluation of industry or through farming. Atelier van Lieshout is working on a series of idealistic, avant-garde farms for the future, but also for the present and the past.

Hagioscope is the first of the farms produced in this series, a large cross-shaped diorama set in the imaginary date of 'year zero'. The farm can be entered, but also viewed from the outside through small openings in the walls...

...comparable to the small windows that can be found in certain churches in the Netherlands, which enabled outcasts such as lepers and prostitutes to witness the celebration of mass from outside the church – the so-called 'hagioscope'.
Parallel to this farm, AVL developed a high-tech farm for the future called the Insect Farm, where insects will be bred as a high-protein, low-carbon footprint solution for feeding the increasing world population.

The final goal is to create a single larger-than-life pavilion comprising all the individual farms, which will be connected by tunnels, corridors, doors, and hatches. By entering this farm, visitors will engage in labyrinth-like time travel through the ages.
Additionally, New Tribal Labyrinth provides ritual objects, totem-like sculptures and dwellings for the tribes of the future...

...including Panta Rhei, a totem-like work that refers to harmony and balance, consisting of three figures that are connected via funnel tubes.

...Temple, which serves as a retreat for contemplation and worship. It is a sheltered space, half underground and covered with grass and sand. Inside is a statue of a Funnelhead, a frequently recurring theme in the works of AVL. Funnelhead is a symbol for the human state being force-fed physically as well as mentally.
...and Hieronymus, whose organic shapes evoke images of both man and beast, and refer to the fantastical forms and figures of the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. At the same time, in true Avant fashion, the work has a functional quality to it, as it balances on the boundary between sculpture piece and functional object.

New Tribal Labyrinth reflects on our extremely advanced and complex society, on over-consumption and the scarcity of the raw materials on which this society is built. In Atelier van Lieshout's opinion, this is a society that cannot survive....
Once supplies are exhausted, we will see a hardening of relations between people, increased survival tactics, possibly even armed conflict - and the emergence of a tribal future. The question is whether these radical changes, which are coupled with violence but may also lead to a new improved society, are good or bad.
ART AS TECHNIQUE

Viktor Shklovsky

If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic; if one remembers the sensations of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time and compares that with his feeling at performing the action for the ten thousandth time, he will agree with us. Such habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed. In this process, ideally realized in algebra, things are replaced by symbols. Complete words are not expressed in rapid speech; their initial sounds are barely perceived. Alexander Pogodin offers the example of a boy considering the sentence 'The Swiss mountains are beautiful' in the form of a series of letters: T, S, m, a, b.

This characteristic of thought not only suggests the method of algebra, but even prompts the choice of symbols (letters, especially initial letters). By this 'algebraic' method of thought we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions; we do not see them in their entirety but rather recognize them by their main characteristics. We see the object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette. The object, perceived thus in the manner of prose perception, fades and does not leave even a first impression; ultimately even the essence of what it was is forgotten. Such perception explains why we fail to hear the prose word in its entirety (see Leo Jakubinsky's article) and, hence, why (along with other slips of the tongue) we fail to pronounce it. The process of 'algebrization,' the over-automatization of an object, permits the greatest economy of perceptive effort. Either objects are assigned only one proper feature—a number, for example—or else they function as though by formula and do not even appear in cognition:

I was cleaning and, meandering about, approached the divan and couldn't remember whether or not I had dusted it. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious I could not remember and felt that it was impossible to remember—so that if I had dusted it and forgot—that is, had acted unconsciously, then it was the same as if I had not. If some conscious person had been watching, then the fact could be established. If, however, no one was looking, or looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.

And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. 'If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.' And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life;

1 Alexander Pogodin, Vazyakh, ka4 kvirochestvo (Language as Art) (Kharkov, 1915), p. 42. (The original sentence was in French, 'Les montagnes de la Suisse sont belles,' with the appropriate initials.)

2 Leo Tolstoy's Diary, entry dated February 29, 1897. (The date is transcribed incorrectly; it should read March 1, 1897.)