

COMPILER*03

Essays

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bankleer (Karin Kasböck, Christoph Leitner)

REALE RESTE / REAL REMNANTS

The horror of the first zombie films, which consistently referred to the “voodoo cult”, differs from the one evoked by traditional creatures of horror such as witches, vampires and werewolves in that that zombies manifest a collective. Zombies always appear in groups and everybody runs the risk of becoming a zombie him- or herself. The appearance of the zombified in the western societies is a basic horror scenario: the return of non-functional barbarianism introduced by African slaves. In most of the zombie movies the colonial slave economy is only rarely directly addressed yet it is always present in the background in the creation of myths.

William Seabrock’s autobiographical Haiti travelogue *The Magic Island*, which was published in 1929, contributed to the propagation of the zombie myth. The book emerged in the sunset of the US occupation of Haiti and the film *White Zombie* (1932; directed by Victor Halprin) was based on it, the first zombie film of American cinema. The genre’s success in its early years is closely linked to the exotic cultural atmosphere of the Caribbean. Tropical islands, the jungle and the apparently pre-civilized enigmatic rites of voodoo generated suspense in the North American and European movie theaters. A magic-religious culture with dance rituals, demonic forces, human sacrifices and dark knowledge that was deemed overcome for ages. This zombie horror touches upon all the fears that can be repressed by enlightened and rational western thinking but can never be disposed of and opens up a fantastic, irrational and uncontrollable space. In *White Zombie* the zombies are held captive as working slaves from the netherworld by a white colonial exploiter and have to spend their days in endless drudgery – they touch upon the American fears of the time: the country found itself in the midst of the Great Depression with an unemployment rate of almost 25%. The zombies appeared as a startling vision from hell and an ironical reversal of the American hope for a job.

The zombie – an empty body envelope that acts like an automaton and is beyond all human appeal – is an outstandingly suitable materialization of collective horror. As a monstrous phenomenon the zombie is one of the young representatives of fictional horror and a mirror reflecting collective fantasies and fears. Its raw cadaver can be filled at one’s pleasure with various different manifestations of the monstrous. Whether personifying a nuclear worst case scenario, science-fiction horror, a bio weapon, workers reduced to objects or the excluded within the social texture – the zombie is always organized around an empty core. What it lacks is a soul/agalma, the innermost aspect of its being, and it is unable to fill this blank space without access. Driven by the blind authority of an endless instinct it turns into a monster that is not committed to any human laws anymore. The zombie represents the unintegratable, immortal rest, a perfect projection screen for the return of the repressed.

With the emergence of the zombie the uncanny field of the undead opens up. Here we have to deal with a zone “between the two deaths”, the zone between the symbolic and the real death: “The utmost antithesis of horror is this sudden emergence of life beyond death ...”¹ In this nightmarish in-between zone real contexts of meaning dissolve and new ones come into being, spaces split and borders shift. Fragments of the real blend with the ones of illusion and new fictions emanate from this. According to Lacan, the crossing of and making oneself familiar with this zone is an essential step to subjectivation and allows for the fundamental rearrangement of one’s experience. As a “wiedergänger”[someone who raises from the dead] from this zone, the zombie introduces a virus, new meanings, fragments etc. to reality, which, in their turn, trigger off direct interventions into the real with which we have to deal with. Western capitalist politics make every endeavor to avoid any encounter with this in-between zone, to mask it by means of idealization or to incorporate it into the unrestrained global capitalism. As the illusion of infinite growth is the main motor of all political economy, the obsession of all political and economical endeavors lies in the attempt to sustain this phantasm by hook or by crook. Death – as the signifier of the dirty/undemocratic downside of production – invalidates the smooth functioning of this illusion. It represents the absolute negation of infinite accumulation.

Today’s ‘postpolitics’ – where, rather than public debate and politicization, ideology-free ideas that work in the frame of global capitalism are in great demand – are even about the complete exclusion of such “wiedergängers of the repressed”. Yet, according to Jacques Rancière, real politics are the exact opposite of this, i.e. they have to include the political discourse on exclusion: “This identification of the non-part with the whole, the part of society that has no exactly determined place in it with the general public, is the elemental gesture of politicization.”²

But if the excluded without a fixed place in society indeed remain excluded, then, according to Žižek/Lacan, “the political returns to the real in the shape of new nonfunctional atrocities.”³ Here Žižek speaks of the social excretion of a “ghostlike and insubstantial appearance on an interface and the raw body-residue of the Real.”⁴ This return to the Real with excessive and “nonfunctional” outbursts of violence is an integral part of the social condition of capitalism and shows its otherwise covered true colors.

Among current examples for this there are migrants, who try to reach Europe under perilous circumstances, disenfranchised workers in special economic zones outside state control, prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo held captive in a zone between the laws, or middle class youths freaking out. Here is one example: “Police have solved the enigma of the corpse that has been found in the so called ‘Frühlinger Hölzl’ near Traunreut. It was no murder but an unbelievably brutal act of desecration of a dead body. A group of ten youths celebrated Walpurgis night in that forest and found the corpse of a

suicide. Being considerably drunk at the late hour, they dragged the corpse away from the thicket where they had found him, bound it to a tree and blew upon the dead body with an iron bar and other objects.” (Traunreut, May 1, 2006, Passauer Neue Presse)

Our project REALE RESTE features the zombie as a “wiedergänger of the repressed”. It guides us through the phantasm of a functioning global capitalism and familiarizes us with its excessive/dirty downside. The footage was shot in the urban rubble and waste architecture of a derelict house in the center of Halle (D), in an estate of prefabricated houses ready for demolition and in a tropical leisure resort that had moved into a colossal investment ruin.

Endnotes

- 1 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 2001.
- 2 Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 2003.
- 3 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 2001.
- 4 Slavoj Žižek, *ibid.*

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Evtixia Bibassis

TALES FROM THE HANDICRAFT WORKSHOP

Stronger than ever before, we seem to be the architects of our own fortune. We are, so to speak, free to choose how we express our individuality. We craft our own identity, and bring it to the trial within our social environment. But it is the other's view that constitutes our diverse existence and the other's identification that places us within society.

Until recently, class and gender strongly constrained the processes of individualization and our choice of social belonging. The individual purpose of life consisted of adapting to the „natural given facts“ as well as possible, and establishing oneself within that social embedment. It was necessary to behave in a way that was considered appropriate for the assigned niche. Fighters struggling for different causes – like feminism, post-colonialism amongst others – managed to promote the social discourse against the established set of rules, and fight for the emancipation or the de-naturalisation of humans with respect to their origin and sex. Upon closer examination, however, the liberation from the social constriction and the gained freedom of choice also reveals anxieties and the necessity to choose. Today, the processes of individualization of the „First World“ are marked – theoretically at least – by the fact that nothing is given, and that nothing is stable either. The sociologist and philosopher Zigmunt Bauman calls our age liquid modernity. He notes that not only the individual social embedment, but also the individual goals that we strive for are in a constant state of flux. *Panta rhei recycled*. Everything is in motion: the individuals, the goals and the paths that lead there. Activities like pursuing a profession can barely contribute to a long-term social placing. „Qui débute sa carrière chez Microsoft n'a aucune idée de là où il la terminera. La commencer chez Ford ou Renault s'était au contraire la quasi-certitude de la finir au même endroit“*, as the economist Daniel Cohen aptly put it.

Irritated by a photo in a newspaper, Jérôme Leuba decided to look for the origin of that picture's theme. While doing his research, he came across some amateur film recordings: the Found Footage material. Here, Leuba consciously places the film material in a new context and reinterprets it as a contemporary comment, as *Battlefield # 2/knac*. He thereby visualizes the new uncertainty. The seamstresses of a factory are not sitting in front of their sewing machines, but parading on the catwalk. They are wearing the brand-name cloths that they had only just produced, and that they would never be able to afford. On the Battlefield of protest, they are establishing a space for negotiation. But it is not up to the employees to negotiate the increase of efficiency or productivity. In the name of global competition, they have to submit themselves to economization. Flexibility is the new currency. The loss of certainty and social embedment is opposed by a theoretically indefinite number of options. Disembedded, human beings have to place themselves within the social fabric, collectively and single-handedly. Single steps and whole paths can be

chosen over and over again, but never predicted. A seamstress might be sitting in front of her machine today, but tomorrow her workplace could already be transferred to a low-wage country. A new patch would be forced upon her patchwork-identity. A new meaningful element would have to be found and renegotiated.

In accordance with to the new qualities of an individualized and more flexible world, it is no surprise that capitalism has changed its direction like a flag in the wind. The productivity of the formerly oppressed and repressed people has been rediscovered. The white, male, heterosexual claim to power, however, is not supposed to be shaken by this recent reinterpretation. Today, a woman of the western world may by all means be intelligent. She may be successful, independent, attractive and a good mother, as well as an incomparable lover. And everything at once, of course! But she is faced by a dilemma on her path of individualization. If she settles for the one, she will feel guilty about not having chosen the other. If she opts for diverse roles, the danger of excessive demands will impend over her like the sword of Damocles. Whatever decision she makes, it will never be the right one. The dilemma is part of the structural oppression that denies women the feeling of comfort, whatever role they choose. For that reason, Katia Bassanini's business woman, adaptedly dressed in a beige suit, clings to the glittering surface of trite adjectives. As if those adjectives were able to redeem the Multitasking Woman-woodcut. The figure appears to be financially independent, but like the hamster in the wheel, it is running after a newly chosen ideal that was never meant to be reached. With humorous irony, Katia Bassanini enters the field of chosen biographies. She contrasts her general comment on this specific, contemporary, urban image of women with the sound of an imaginary business street in New York City. The lyrics – Oh yeah it's great. Wonderful, yes, yes – are driven by an inaudible but constantly propelling beat, and seem to hold the sinister conglomerate of unfinished tasks together. But the thread it is hanging by will tear – for sure. Still, it is possible to encounter the white, male, heterosexual design of an urban woman with a critical mind. At least that is what the performance video Treadmill lets us hope. Designed on the drawing board, so to say, this concept, like the preceding one, does not represent any unalterable occurrence of our time. It is an unconditional matter of negotiation.

An other simple play for cultural power and its structure is presented in Elodie Pong's performance video *Je suis une bombe*. The dominant subject of the white, male cultural majority is looking down upon the exoticized other in a brightly-lit room. Or differently put: the desired object is in the powerful subject's field of vision. For the time being, nothing is being negotiated. The rolls seem to be fixed. The destructive force unfolds when the female body is brought, by degrees, to full bloom: Her identity is initially solidified by that colonial gaze. Pong's female figure, however, is not transfixed like a belittled object. It exposes the ritual of all too simple identification. It reveals the empowerment. It uncovers the invasion of the identified by the identifier. Through the exaggeration and repetition of racist-sexist

external ascription, Pong's female protagonist reduces that plain old, colonial gesture of power to absurdity. No, identities cannot be reduced or one-sidedly fixed. On the contrary, they are a matter of negotiation between people. In the complex identities of individuals many different stories and cultures are interwoven. Pong's *Je suis une bombe* invites us to new stories of the relationship between the I and the You. We are incited to accounts of the I that are non-violent, indefinite and clearly hybrid – be that I female, male, or of whatever origin, and independent of sexual preferences.

Evtixia Bibassis, Zurich 2009

*“Who begins his carrier at Microsoft has no idea where he will end it. Who began his carrier at Ford or Renault, in contrast, was almost certain to end it there.” Cited in: Zygmunt Bauman: *The Individual Society*, 2001, p. 146.

Translation from the German by Gregory Siegl, Zurich

Herbert Schnepf

FILM / Labour

The history of the depiction of labour in film and the medium itself have the same point of departure: *La Sortie de L'Usine Lumière à Lyon – Labourers leaving the Factory* (1895). A fundamental positioning with respect to every form of employment is thus performed: the medium of film sees labour mainly through the subject, his or her hopes, anxieties, rage and anger. The direction the workmen take at the beginning of film history can also be read programmatically: it is a movement away from labour.

Innumerable films tell the same story, namely the attempt at escaping oppression and dependence. In the 20th century, this is often equivalent to the deliverance from repressive labour conditions. Here, one might mention Bernardo Bertolucci's *1900/Novecento* as an example. Bertolucci's film portrays the 20th century as a struggle for liberation that is centrally characterized by the distribution of property and the conditions of labour.

The origins of motion pictures and the political movement of labourers coincide. Beyond this concurrence, however, the medium of film is also closely connected to the social phenomenon that is now disappearing as much as cinema itself: that of the employee.

In 1930, the German sociologist, film critic and theorist Siegfried Kracauer devoted himself to the connection between film and the employee in a treatise titled “*Die Angestellten*” (“*The Salaried Masses*”). He describes the everyday life of this social group as characterized by a form of labour which the individual cannot conciliate with his or her own needs and interests. Working life is experienced as inevitably alienated and cinema, then, is the site where the gaps left by daily routine are filled with the lights of animated pictures. For the Kracauer of the interwar period, however, these gaps are only apparently filled. The real-life conditions that are heightened to the point of being unbearable are supposed to lever out the capitalist system in a dialectic turnover, and thereby create space for a more just social order.

Instead, all hopes were bitterly disappointed when fascism gained the upper hand. Accordingly, Bertolucci lets his epic begin where the fascists are put to flight. Kracauer sets in after the Second World War with his *Theory of Film* (1960), in which, once more, the medium of film is connected with the state of mind of the working masses, a connection he views with hope. However, it is not the labourers' deeds and their consequences that play the leading part, but the work of the medium of

film itself as an aesthetic act.

Kracauer defines the medium's work as the collecting and presenting of particles of reality. These are arranged in random formations around the subject and are supposed, in the mirror of the film, to allow the spectator a view of himself. All particles have to be left unchanged if one intends to generate a genuine impression.

In contrast, Kracauer defines the work that art has to do as the assembling of singular parts to create something new, which is why he was often accused of being dogmatic. In my opinion, however, these charges grasp at nothing. Boundaries are there where we draw them. But indisputably, they have to be drawn. Of course, different standards are applied to an art film than a feature film or documentary.

Our theoretical viewpoint of the work that the medium of film has to do has shifted just as much as labour itself has changed. Industrial manufacturing is dwindling in western countries much in the same way as the existence of the employee, and the achievements connected with the classical forms of employment.

Labour now presents itself as a chimera, as in Christian Petzold's *Yella*. The emancipatory drama, as one finds it in Stefan Ruzowitzky's *Die Siebtelbauern* (1998), has made way for a form of presentation in which the drama of labour has become the drama of the individual. But in a different way than Mike Nichol's *Silkwood* from 1983 where Meryl Streep performs the role of Karen Silkwood grandly alongside Cher, but tragically fails in a struggle against the American nuclear power industry.

Yella's adversaries have become impalpable, faceless. It seems all the more appropriate to overlay the story of a neo-liberal working life with elements of the horror movie genre since all horror has lost its face since *Psycho* (1960). Nothing is left to the individual but his or her self and fear. *Yella* tries to get hired on the job market, but, surrounded by dubious characters, eventually fails, and falls into line with immorality.

In 2009, 114 years after the labourers quit the Lumière brothers' factory, our view of labour in films has notably darkened. What is left is to wait and see how the current crisis will influence the situation.

Herbert Schnepf, Tunis, 2009

Translation from the German by Gregory Siegl, Zurich

Christian Frings, Felix Klopotek, Malte Meyer, Peter Scheiffele

DRUM BEATS DETROIT – BLACK FACTORY REVOLTS 1968

Even if people would rather ignore it these days, 1968 is still eponymous as the revolutionary uprising against terror in the factories as it is 'the year of revolts', In Detroit, "Motor City USA" and 'heart' of the Ford factory despotism, black workers stood up against the assembly line and fought racist oppression. With Marx and Fanon taking a stance against slavery in work – a look back at the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and their struggle in the USA. .

Please Mr. Foreman!

Wednesday, 15th July 1970. James Johnson Jr. is on the late shift. In the Eldon Avenue Acheson gear plant at Chrysler in Detroit, Michigan. He's been working on the forge for almost a year, sending six brake pads a minute into the 380-degree gorge. Work for black people. Please Mr. Foreman, slow down your assembly line. He's had this job, this 'improved' job, since January 1969. Improved in terms of what the work entails, but with more racism and harassment. The 36 year old is the only black person here. On the 15th of July he is sent to work on the forge again. He can't find his gloves. The personnel department suspends him for one day for avoiding work. James thinks he's been fired. Workin' twelve hours a day. Seven long days a week, I lie down and try to rest, but, Lord knows, I'm too tired to sleep. A little before five he returns to the factory, a weapon hidden in his trouser leg. He runs, but not amok – he takes aim at the white uniform of the foreman. Two are white, one black. He let's himself be cuffed without restraint. No, I don't mind workin', but I do mind dyin'. Kenneth Cockrel takes up his defence, a young, Marxist-schooled lawyer and leading member of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. His strategy is as follows: Chrysler had its finger on the trigger, therefore Chrysler is the killer, Chrysler is the one who belongs on the dock. He manages to convince the Jury, the majority of which is black. Unbearable work beleaguering, racist humiliation on a daily basis. James comes from Mississippi. At the age of nine, he is forced to watch his cousin being lynched by a white mob. In 1953 he moves to Detroit, but soon finds that racism isn't just a 'privilege' of the south. In the Thirties, the Ku Klux Klan in Michigan had over 200,000 members. Cockrel takes the jury on a tour of the factory. I said, Lord, why don't you slow down that assembly line? As the jury walk through the building, workers on the machines stand with raised fists. James Johnson Jr. is set free. The white judge goes wild and orders forcible detainment in a psychiatric unit. Two years later, a lawyer from the Motor City Labor League fights for financial compensation for James Johnson from Chrysler. In 1975 he is released from the institution. Saturday, 22nd July 1967: two young black men are holding a party. The party is in one of Detroit's many 'blind pigs', (illegal bars), on the corner of 12th Street and Clairmount on the west side of the city. They rejoice – they have survived the Vietnam war. In the early hours of Sunday, the police appear. The agent of power uses the language of pure

violence. The agent doesn't alleviate pressure and doesn't conceal authority. Rather, he flaunts it; he expresses it using the good conscience of law enforcement. The agent brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonised.

No, I don't mind workin', but I do mind dyin'

The raid becomes awkward. Instead of just a couple of revellers as expected there are 82 guests present. Nevertheless: all of them should be arrested! The crowd's size and anger grows by the minute but is still too weak to intervene. As the final police car drives off, the plundering begins. A few whites join in. The wave of riots hasn't stopped since 1964. In 1967 alone there were revolts in 128 larger cities across the USA. Detroit's "12th Street Riot" was the bloodiest and heaviest of them all. Violence, that stands behind the establishment of the colonial world, that pounds an incessant rhythm of native social forms, is, for the moment, claimed and adopted by the colonised, as the colonised masses, resolutely, and in order to become active history, launch upon the forbidden cities. The Detroit Police Department is known for its brutality. With four-man troops, up to 95% white, they harass, beat, and shoot them. The blacks. As the mayor attempts to increase the fraction of black civil servants in 1967, the white cops protest in their own manner. Black people are arrested for any kind of small matter. The impotence of the civil liberty movement in the case of racism and segregation has been clear for a long while. Deep down, the colonised doesn't recognise any kind of authority. He is submissive but not tamed. He is belittled but not convinced of his lowly position. He waits patiently for slackness in the colonial master's vigilance, in order to dispossess him. By Sunday night there are three thousand attacking the police with bottles and stones. Both Mayor and Governor beg the Government for help. President Lyndon B. Johnson sends 4,700 parachutists to Detroit. They just returned from Vietnam. In total, 10,000 soldiers and national guard members are mobilised. On the 24th of July, 283 buildings are in flames, 1,800 arrests. The Local 3 of the United Automobile Workers make their premises available to the national guard close to Dodge's main production plant, Chrysler since 1928. The factory in the centre of the city should be protected. Black workers' resistance against their unions' support of combating the uprising is impossible. Dodge Main is on leave due to a model change; therefore most of the black car workers are not involved in the riot. After six days: 43 dead, of which 33 are black, most of them killed by the bullets of state violence. One worker from the chassis construction is amongst the dead. Almost 500 are wounded, over 7,000 arrests and 2,000 buildings burnt to the ground. 10,000 are said to have taken part in the rebellion. The establishment founds the New Detroit Committee. Gigantic modern buildings are planned. Ford and General Motors offer more jobs to young afro-Americans. Some of them, students from the Wayne State University in the heart of Detroit and workers from the car factories, found the monthly paper Inner City Voice. The headline of the first edition from October 1967 reads: "Michigan Slavery". The issue discusses the logistics of the resistance – in preparation for the next one. It criticises racism and capitalism, slavery and exploitation. The youngsters know their way around Detroit's undogmatic political scene, have read Fanon

and C.L.R. James (1), have discussed the Hungarian revolution in 1956 with Marty Glaberman (2) and have studied Marx's 'Capital' in his courses. The discovery of gold and silver in America, the eradication, enslaving and burial of the indigenous inhabitants in the mines, the initial conquering and plundering of East India, the transformation of Africa into a compound for the trade hunt of black-skinned people marks the dawning of the capitalist production era.

Apartheid rules in Detroit Motor City

Thursday, 2nd May 1968 – late shift in Dodge's main plant in the centre of Detroit; 12,000 employees. Six women and two men place themselves in front of the entrance after the meal break at 22:00 and demand that their colleagues participate in a strike. 3,000 respect the picketing. The wild strike shuts down production until Sunday. The women, Catholics of Polish-origin, are fed up to the back teeth. There had already been some 'wild' strikes (wildcats) in March and April, protesting against the increased rate of production: The cycle rate has risen from 49 to 56 cars per hour, 14%, but with only 7% additional workforce. The trade union seems helpless. The young women, supported by two black employees, cannot wait any longer. The management promises more personnel and threatens them with sanctions. Work is to proceed again on Monday. At first nothing happens. The bosses don't apply immediate punishments in fear of risking another wildcat. One week later, Saturday night, between 23 and 02 hours, individuals are called to the personnel office: Seven are fired, others suspended for a period of 5 to 30 days. Although started by white women, it is predominantly the black workers who are penalised. The foremen are instructed to clamp down on any infringements using strict disciplinary means. The trade union protests but without success. One of the people laid off is 26-year-old General Gordon Baker who belongs to the Inner City Voice circle. Along with a few other colleagues, he invites the workers to a protest assembly on the 14th of May in the trade union headquarters. 300 turn up, more activists and office workers than the UAW can mobilise.

A few days later, the first DRUM publication appears in the work stores: Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement. In July, DRUM manages to organise a two-day wild strike against racism and beleaguering in the factories. 70% of the black workers and a few white workers participate. Nobody is fired. Further RUMs in other Chrysler factories are quickly organised, also some at Ford, Cadillac and UPS. In 1969, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers is founded to coordinate the struggle. The RUMs only coordinate the black members: revolutionary, because they are black. "The aim of the classless society is exactly that, which yesterday and today is the central point of the negroes' struggle. It is the negroes who embody the revolutionary fight for a classless society," wrote the car worker James Boggs in 1963. They are excluded from the 'American Way of Life', and this exclusion gives their fight a specific, revolutionary character. Wednesday 9th September 1925: a white mob throws stones at Ossian Sweet's house. The Afro-American doctor had just recently moved into a white neighbourhood in Detroit with his family. In order to prevent his house being stormed or set alight, he shoots at the crowd and kills a white person. It is not

the Ku Klux Klan that ends up on the dock, but the victim. Dr. Ossian Sweet is set free, but attacks occur well into the seventies if ever the black populace dare to step across the imaginary border surrounding the white residential quarter.

The automobile industry's labour requirements have increased enormously since the turn of the century, seeing Detroit grow at an explosive rate. In 1930 there are 1.6 million people from all over the world living here, in the meantime the fourth largest city in the USA. Only a small minority is black. Initially it was the armament boom during the second world war that boosted black migration from the deep south. The number of black Chrysler workers rose between 1941 and 1945 from zero to 5,000. In sight of the unusually high demand for labour, a type of sarcasm courses through the black 'new-Detroiter' community: Hitler and Tojo are said to have done more for black emancipation than Lincoln and Roosevelt.

Wartime corporatism – hot and cold

Wartime economic automobile and aeroplane construction have transformed Detroit's industrial geography. New factories were no longer erected in black inhabited city centre quarters but instead in the pristine white surroundings of suburbia – only attainable by car. The exodus from Detroit is so strong, that today around 80% of greater Detroit's suburban populace is white. In the industrial and poverty stricken areas throughout the city centre, however, four quarters of the inhabitants are black. It was deindustrialisation alone that caused the shift in the bottom line. As a 'shrinking city', 'Motown' remains the most sharply segregated city in the USA. Wednesday, 17th December 1941: ten days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, US president Roosevelt orders managers and union workers to the White House. Conflict in the workplace should be avoided for the duration of the war. The union bosses qualify as 'New Men of Power', (C. Wright Mills), by gaining the allowance to manage of employee's interests. For the duration of the Second World War, they want to disable strike movements in the 'democratic armouries'. The 'no strike pledge', (hastily propagated by the Communists since the dissolution of the Hitler-Stalin pact), cannot prevent the arisal of numerous wild strikes during the war. After Japanese capitulation, wartime corporatism is revoked but reinstated after 1945 with the onset of the anti-communist McCarthy witch-hunts against labour oppositional movements. The wage agreement between the UAW and General Motors in 1950 marks a seminal moment: in a counter-manoeuvre against automatic wage adjustment the union offers the company a five-year planning assurance and allows the management free hand in organising exploitative processes. "The company and the union had developed a division of labour. The company took care of the machines and the union took care of the workers. The American auto workers are told by the mass media that they have the highest standard of living in the world. They are not, however, told that they are simultaneously working under the highest and most awful pressure to perform." (Steve Babson)

Neither house nor factory slaves

Thursday, 21st November 1963: 700 people have arrived in Detroit in order to take part in the Northern Grassroots Conference. Malcolm X appears and dismisses the illusion of the civil rights movement: "...if someone comes to you right now and says: 'Let's separate,' you say the same thing that the house Negro said on the plantation. 'What you mean, separate? From America? This good white man? Where you going to get a better job than you get here?' I mean, this is what you say. 'I ain't left nothing in Africa,' that's what you say. Why, you left your mind in Africa." The black people could only achieve Uhuru – Kiswahili for 'freedom' – if they stopped begging for cups of tea like a subordinate house slave. Interest in separatism grew, as the civil rights movement began to hit constraints. General Gordon Baker borrows the term Uhuru in the 'Message to the Grassroots' and founds a same-name organisation, the precursor of DRUM. Politically, many of the unions attest to being liberal, whereas on site in the factories the black employees collide with institutional racism of the UAW. The RUMs can be sure they won't receive aid from the white people. In 1968 in Detroit one quarter of the UAW membership is black but only seven percent of them are functionaries. The first DRUM flyer states: "The black brothers and sisters make up 60% of the production workers, but the amount of black supervisors and black union workplace representatives is not worth mentioning."

Sit-in against increased production and excessive absence

At the end of the sixties, disciplinary offences rise in the automobile factories. As a result of the unbearable beleaguering in the workplace, many of the boys quit the job immediately after starting. Recurrent reasons of dismissal at Dodge are disobedience, abandoning the workplace, excessive absence, and drug consumption. Most of the young black and white workers smoke joints on the job in order to relieve the monotony. The management accepts this in order to prevent anything worse happening. Acts of sabotage increase, as well as the number of wildcats: short sit-ins against production rate, against racist attacks by foremen, against dismissals and penalties. Tension and violence in departments of the inner-city automobile factories is similar to that seen during the riot-zone street conflicts in the Summer of 1967. As did the liberal local government lose its legitimacy and were not able to channel the anger of the black populous, did the factory management and union lose control of the working process. For a short time the RUMs and the League – alone products of the factory revolts – are able to combine the struggles and express them as revolutionary. From the beginning, their policies are internationalist. In its ninth publication DRUM states 14 demands, one of which is: Equal pay for black and white workers in South African Chrysler factories. In December 1968, the League participates in a conference in Italy, resulting in regular contact between militants from the automobile cities Detroit and Turin. The helplessness of the UAW's well-known anti-communist reaction towards DRUM's demands mirrors the panic of the global dimensions of '1968'. "It seems to us, that the communist-inspired Black Power movement of plundering and arson that was initially used as a citation for the student revolts is now attempting to draw the black labourers into the revolution. It is exactly this combination of events that the reds had recently, and almost

successfully, employed to try and lead France behind the Iron Curtain. As they front a small group of student strikers, the communist thugs prevent French workers from returning to the workplace," writes the official UAW magazine, *Battleline*, in July 1968. In Paris and Detroit these lines only cause hearty laughter. The internationalism of this movement was much closer-to-home than the UAW imagined and didn't need any 'red spectres' in the confederacy.

Techno as a reflection of the city's downfall

And today? DRUM beats on, literally: The beginning of the 1980s sees the start of Detroit Techno, black-stemming music, which has its roots in radio shows from Charles Johnson. Johnson mixes funk tracks with instrumental hip-hop and the mechanical sounds of Kraftwerk. The first 'proper' Techno producers, Derrick May or Juan Atkins, understand the sound to be a reflection of the downfall of the city, following the beginnings of de-industrialisation in the mid 70s: Techno parties are held in dilapidated factory halls. The second generation, collectives such as Underground Resistance and Drexciya – charge their music with political intent: Anonymity of the makers, no collaboration with larger labels, no interviews. On the 3rd of September 2002, James Marcel Stinson dies. Only after his death is it made public that he was a member of Drexciya. Stinson's primary occupation was as a driver. Singing worker. Please Mr. Foreman!

Endnotes

- 1) Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-1989), Caribbean Marxist, writer, journalist and politician. Great influence upon anti-colonial freedom movements and the Black Power movement in the USA.
- 2) Marty Glaberman (1918-2001), automobile worker, student of CLR James, later worked as a historian at Wayne State University. Represented the radical stance of the autonomous class struggles.

Sources and further reading

The quotes found in the text stem from Franz Fanon ("The damned of this Earth"), Karl Marx (*Capital*, part 1) and from the song "Please, Mr. Foreman, slow down your assembly line," written in 1965 by Joe Lee Carter as he worked at Ford in Detroit on the assembly line. Information in this article touches upon the following texts, amongst others, in which further instructions can be found. One of the best books is: Dan Georgakas/Marvin Surkin: *Detroit. I Do Mind Dying. A Study in Urban Revolution*, South End Press, second abridged publication 1998. Concerning the course of the Chrysler strikes during DRUM times: Steve Jefferys: *Management and managed. Fifty years of crisis at Chrysler*, Cambridge Univ. Press 1986. In the seventies, organisation of black class struggles in Germany was followed with close attention, such as in Volkhard Brandes/Joyce Burke: *USA – Vom Rassenkampf zum Klassenkampf (USA – From race struggle to class struggle)*. Organisation of the black resistance, dtv 1970; Peter M. Michels: *Uprising in the Ghettos. On Organisation of the lumpenproletariat in the USA*, Fischer-TB 1972; Dorothea Peters (Hg.): *USA: Coloured revolution and class struggle*, Trikont 1972. Recommended reading about the contested history of the car industry in Detroit: Heather Ann Thompson: *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*, Cornell Univ. Press 2001; Steve Babson: *Working Detroit. The Making of a Union Town*, Adama Books 1984; The newspaper 'Radical America' also contains numerous articles on the topic: dl.lib.brown.edu/radicalamerica. What they all read back then: James Boggs: *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook, 1963* (online www.historyisaweapon.org/defcon1/amreboggs.html).

Translation from the German by Catriona Shaw, Berlin

This essay has first been published in German in: ak – zeitung für linke debatte und praxis / No. 528 / 23.5.2008.

Conversation between Jürg Lehni and Cathérine Hug

J: First, shall I update you on the way things are going at the moment? Do you remember, the last time we met, I was worried that RITA was going to be too heavy...

C: Yes, I remember, but by "heavy" do you mean the whole mechanism, the industrial components, or what?

J: I was worried that because of its size, it would not be very elegant... but since then it's been looking good. The construction is now finished, and in fact because of the size, the industrial components do not really look cumbersome.

C: So how much time do you have now: two, three weeks?

J: Are you joking? It's got to be running in one week!

C: Ok, sorry. We are obviously talking at just about the most stressful time for you, only a few days from the "christening". So how long have you actually been working on it?

J: That's difficult to say. The idea for the project is already quite old, two years at a guess.

C: So it's not much younger than HEKTOR?

J: Well, that's not quite true. What happened was that a couple of interior designers wanted to permanently install HEKTOR in a bar, which is basically a pretty stupid idea, because HEKTOR in a bar really wouldn't work, because of spray dust, because of the smell he gives off, and also not because he would be in constant use, and for this you constantly need new surfaces. The bar in question doesn't exist, but was going to be created, in an industrial building in Winterthur, and the place was going to be massive. Also, there was no real clear concept behind it, they just asked me: they had a glass wall, and at first they didn't know what to do with it, and then they had the idea that it might be interesting to make it change automatically over and over again, to project onto it, and that's how they came up with HEKTOR. Well, I considered whether there was a solution that could take advantage of the circumstances better, and that's when I thought of those whiteboard markers that you can paint with and then wipe off again. Using this material specifically in a context such as this, the machine would really have functioned like a display. That was the idea: a writing machine that can specifically modify what is written, can add something to the picture, can erase and begin again, can tell stories and show signs of development. And naturally this idea came from HEKTOR, because he has already been used variously as an instrument for performances. Although I'm not keen on the word "performance" in principle.

C: Why not – because it gives specified reception guidelines for how the viewers have to behave?

J: If you tell people that there is a performance taking place, they come along with the idea that they must follow the event from start to finish, and they don't dare to go away before it is finished.

C: There is also an artistic peak promised, but that may not be very relevant in this context.

J: While with HEKTOR, when it's up and running, during less gripping moments, you can go and get a beer, carry on and come back later, as you like. He runs far slower than any normal performance...

C: But with RITA it is different, perhaps because it takes longer to understand how the

mechanism behind her works, and I suppose she attracts attention because she moves faster, in a more elaborated way.

J: Not entirely, because the system is already widely known: the operating system is industrial and not all that revolutionary.

C: Reminiscent of the gripper arms of industrial robots?

J: That was also the original idea for this bar in the old industrial area, changing the place's use to allude to its industrial background and to all the work that used to go on there from day to day... other than that the machine now paints. But I'm jumping from one theme to another...

C: But jumping, and explaining things associatively, is ok. Machines don't do that.

J: No, they do what I want...

C: Now, if you have a look around, to see what sort of drawing machines there are in art and in the wider cultural field, you realise that there really aren't a huge number.

J: There are some though! But I agree – it's true that it's not a huge number.

C: For example, there is the famous GraffitiWriter, activism in the form of art, exonerating people and making a machine liable instead.

J: It's interesting that you mention the GraffitiWriter, since the original idea for HEKTOR was for him to function in the same way. I did not know this project, and, relatively naively, I just wanted to build a machine that would function as an output device for the computer, but that would not be accurate. Direct, inaccurate and dirty, just like graffiti and not like a superclean printer. In this respect it was also going to be a statement about computer-supported graphic design. That was back in 2001-2002, when there was a general movement away from the clean computer style.

C: In rebellion against the cool aesthetics and streamlined forms of the Nineties? And interestingly, it would be good for this kind of bar, a product of gentrification as you described it, to have these possibilities again.

J: Exactly, and now we really need to go back a long way: since for the first time there is a predominant style that has established itself.

C: Which has surely led, through the Internet, to nothing less than an international alignment in graphic design?

J: Yes, and also due to the fact that the software used is overall the same, but then there was a rebellion against this: people have begun to do illustrations again, working by hand with collages and stencils. I see HEKTOR as my contribution to this wave. The opposing trends have now been taken up in their own right and are developing a style for themselves that is becoming mainstream again. That is also to be interpreted as an indication that the people behind this concept bar want to use HEKTOR for their own purposes.

C: Now, if we could talk about RITA, it would interest me very much, in connection with the glass she stands behind, to know how much of a role her aesthetic components have played, during the development of this machine, in the conversations with the two engineers you have been working closely with. More particularly, RITA fits directly into the context of the museum, and as a Swiss

artist abroad the comparison with Tinguely for example is obvious. Perhaps this comparison is a little sentimental, in that Tinguely still provides a bit of a cultural patriotic flavour and paradoxically his drawing machines come across as a bit trashy. But I am amazed at how much it has influenced you and perhaps even put you under pressure, when you were using the latest technology and more a elaborate programming language to develop RITA, to create something that from the moment it "performs" or is installed in the museum, is no longer basically enhanced by yourself, but perhaps underlies other machines, analogous to a half-life? So how do you see that moment when you must hand RITA over for other people to use?

J: Developing RITA was a long process, and one during which the conceptual phase was comparatively elaborate. This is another difference with HEKTOR, that RITA is architectural and is much bigger. However, the project has changed a great deal through the many influences and ideas for implementation in the various contexts that have been considered, but from a purely technical point of view it has changed very little. Regarding what you touched on at the latest technical development appraisal – it does not present a problem; it's not going that quickly. Things are indeed moving quickly in

communications technology, and perhaps also generally with the calculation and memory capacity of computers, but these are already quite fast enough to guide this machine, with them it will still be able to function just as well in 15 years' time. And in the meantime, revolutionary discoveries in mechanics have been much scarcer than in micro- or even nanotechnology. But the difficult thing about the work phases is that you have various different modes, and this was also the case with HEKTOR. My position is that I am constantly working within various fields at the same time – before it was more between graphic design and programming, and now perhaps art can be added to that, so that with RITA, whose initial situation was clearly that she was a service instrument, the question arises how much art is really going to be talked about. Indeed, this machine, installed in a museum, could also have quite a practical use, for example as a display for programme announcements, but at the same time artists can use her to develop pictures or explain drawing patterns. For me that really is the statement: an instrument offering new possibilities that have never existed before. Now that can be termed art, but it can just as well be defined as a service, or as the work of an inventor. For me, the definition is not clear, and is not really all that important, or intentionally unclear, if you like. I myself use HEKTOR, although not so often any more, but I work with him much more like an art director inviting artists, who then mostly have a free hand.

C: With HEKTOR, I know that the results can come out very differently, depending on who is working with him and where. Now can I assume that for RITA the differentiation of stroke, force and dynamics will be even greater?

J: In that sense, HEKTOR is really not differentiated, just on/off! That's what's great about him, that the differentiation is not controllable, it depends on the weather, the humidity... with the same cap and yet fairly haphazard.

C: So how do things stand with RITA? I ask this because I know of an artist you have invited to Stockholm, Annelise Coste: for her, her individual handwriting is an integral component of her artistic work. She writes a word and you know that it's come from her. I therefore find it remarkable and even amazing that Annelise has accepted your invitation. At first glance, I was surprised why she is doing this; but I can imagine that Annelise must be curious to see how far a machine is able to transport her handwriting. What remains at the end of authorship, and how great is the alienation of the personal?

J: I can understand your amazement. However, the uncertainty of the result is precisely what interests me about the possibilities of this machine, unclear authorship. To turn again to the GraffitiWriter, it sprays on the ground in public spaces, so who's the culprit? Of course, it is whoever is steering the vehicle, but they are out of sight, and depending on the circumstances they may not even be there.

And again with RITA, the direct connection between machine and person is questionable; the question being why one draws like this and not in any other way. In any case the illustration is shown here with a digitizer tablet and can reproduce characteristics of the drawing such as flow, impetus, interruptions and so on. On this subject, right now I'm not yet able to tell what will come of it: on the one side this anonymous machine, on the other side the many individuals who were involved in RITA's development and who will be involved when she is put to use. This potentially productive uncertainty factor was also there with HEKTOR, beginning with the creative ping-pong between Uli Franke and myself in the development phase.

C: For RITA, have you been any more able to envisage and plan in advance the people you will invite to use her?

J: I would say that RITA will be much more predictable from the point of view of results than HEKTOR. With HEKTOR, for example, we had really no idea what would be possible and what would not, among other things because of the rudimentary mounting and the fact that there are only two engines, the cable car-style wobble... perhaps we would only be able to make the most rudimentary children's illustrations with it, or perhaps we would be able to create highly complex halftone images. For example, I never thought that the halftone image of Che [Guevara] would come off, that's why I also opted for a portrait that would still be recognisable even with few features, i.e. if the attempt failed. It therefore took on the role of a test picture. With RITA, the technically conditional uncertainty factor has now become much smaller: I know fairly exactly how the XY system controlled by an industrial CNC controller can vary. This was simply different with HEKTOR, when it took a series of tests for us to find out what this machine can really do, and then I had to modify the software on the basis of the results. From this software modification, amusing side effects then emerged, such as for example the circular movement that HEKTOR makes to avoid wobbling, which has given this machine a certain personality and style that I now no longer want to get rid of, even though it is not perfect. And who can tell how many such fascinating moments we will have with RITA?

C: Keyword "pioneer work"! It is a happy coincidence that you are now displaying this machine in Stockholm, in a country where, in 1840, Edvard and George Scheutz built the first mechanical computer.

J: Wasn't that a woman?

C: Ah, now that is another important part of the history of computers, Ada Lovelace, daughter of the poet Lord Byron, wrote down fundamental explanations for Charles Babbage's "Analytical Engine" and counts among the founders of what we call "software" today. But as so often when there is something in the air, complementary events occur in far-distant places, whether in parallel with the main event or afterwards, that all belong to one single development..

J: At the same time, it is not surprising that the Scandinavian countries played an important role back then – plainly not much has changed, if you think of Ericsson or Nokia. For this reason, it is not entirely coincidental that I, after a long and tenacious fundraising campaign for the RITA project, finally found receptive ears in Sweden. One example of this was Festo, an international company that provides us with linear bearings and other invaluable components; it was the Swedish and not the Swiss branch that was prepared to sponsor this crazy project. Of course, that could also have something to do with the fact that the art gallery in which RITA will first be displayed is located in Stockholm. On the other hand, however, it was this art gallery, and not an equivalent institution in Switzerland, that wanted this project.

C: You've just touched upon a distinct reserve and scepticism of the link between art and new technologies, one which dominates the whole of the art world, and which seems to be particularly

pronounced in Switzerland, with its long-established institutions. It seems as though the monopoly is left to a few institutions such as Ars Electronica and ZKM, in order to avoid dispute.

J: That has led to parallel worlds that function relatively independently of one another for good and for bad, and which have spread and grown thanks to globalisation. So there are people making technologically inspired art, who want to exist in this context such as Ars Electronica, and others who specifically avoid this context. On the other hand, these boundaries are showing signs of softening, even in Switzerland, if you think for example of Cory Arcangel's exhibition in Zurich, with its reference to Nintendo. A few years ago, it would have been unimaginable to see that sort of thing in an institution like that.

C: Interestingly, Arcangel's artistic development was no more unconventional than otherwise: through his New York gallery he had been introduced to an interested Swiss public for the first time last year in Basel at the "Liste" art exhibition. Whether this kind of art, influenced or inspired by computer aesthetics, still works on an individual basis in the context of a museum and removed from its format, remains to be seen, but basically it is a positive trend.

J: It helps break down inhibitions. Artists like Carsten Nicolai have already achieved it before, but he represents, to be precise, an aseptic form of expression of what is possible with technology. Nicolai has without doubt contributed to a growing acceptance, but there are many other possibilities that are still underrepresented or totally unknown in the art world. But I still have a few unanswered questions in my head, which I would like to return to here. One is the GraffitiWriter: HEKTOR was originally intended to be a painting vehicle that would not write using the matrix printer system but would trace the line that a writing hand also traces. But that is the great difference between HEKTOR and the GraffitiWriter: the two of them differ from one another in the same way as a plotter and a printer. A printer prints scanline by scanline, while a plotter retraces lines like a person, and that is really an old fascination that I have had since childhood: I find it much more impressive to have a machine that retraces human handwriting. And this is also expressed very nicely in vector graphics: a mathematically described form based on two simple polynomial functions per line segment, with which you can recreate any form. And if you work with them a lot, with time you even develop an intuitive "feel" for how these curves function, and that "feel" is directly linked to the mathematical formula behind them. I like this very much, and in fact for this reason almost all my works up to now have involved it – Vectorama.org, Scriptographer, which is used to operate HEKTOR and RITA... and this remote-controlled car in the style of GraffitiWriter was supposed to retrace with chalk spray, which is washed away again by the rain, super-dimensional hand-drawn shapes on a huge area. . I didn't know this before, but in connection with this I once heard that there are so-called GPS-Drawings, where people devise a route on the map, switch the GPS device to "record" and then trace out the virtual drawings with their car. For the time being, such drawings only exist on the GPS device, and of course as a signal in space, but there they are invisible. Even if the two machines are very different output devices (one like a printer, the other more like a plotter) for me the original idea was for a spraying vehicle, but this was technically too similar to the GraffitiWriter, and I said to myself: if you're going to spray, make it vertical, and I also wanted to directly implement the adolescent characteristics of graffiti – direct, fast, dirty and so on.

C: A spraying can with no sprayer is already fairly provocative...

J: But the prototype character for HEKTOR – it looks as though two adolescents had barricaded themselves in a basement for two months and instead of tinkering around with little pots or with a bomb, it was HEKTOR – and it fits well like that.

C: And the shaky, partly unsteady side of the spraying can, which can be traced back to the software adjustments mentioned by you, does not only serve to balance it out, but also gives HEKTOR a dancing note as a side effect.

J: Funnily enough, in the sequence of movements, HEKTOR is more "feminine" and RITA more masculine, gender benders, so to speak.

C: I am pleased that you are showing them both together – not as competing with one another, and also not to demonstrate didactic development stages, but rather because of the variety of possibilities...

J: Yes, but it is also the case that through HEKTOR I could advance my ideas for RITA. With RITA, the next step is really to present the instrumentalisation of drawing as a sequence of events, namely to use it as a kind of animation.

C: The specifically chosen positioning of both machines in the exhibition room is necessary for technical reasons, but also works well on a dramatic level. While HEKTOR feels his way around in a drawn-out process to complete a mural, the floor-standing, sculpture-like RITA always has to draw new things and wipe off what is already there. So we are involved with totally different machines that offer two possibilities for drawing, and without a doubt there are many more of them. Maybe the next one will even draw on the floor as well?

J: I'm not sure whether the next one will even draw again, but obviously I have not been able to plan anything like that recently. But there are also two further levels for the existing machines. For example, I would like to fit HEKTOR with four engines, as was initially planned: it was quite right to cut to two engines due to technical and time problems, since this reinforced the ambivalence to imprecision, but with four engines (two that still clamp below), this "new" HEKTOR could work a larger area, and spray entire walls of houses, for example with textile pattern-like structures. Imagine the checked pattern from a shirt on an entire house, from top to bottom, patterned all over... Anyway, my work is always changing between development "modes", and then it is "frozen", either until it no longer works and something has to be repaired, or I find islands again in time to develop something. But it is very difficult and stressful to connect these modes to one another, to superimpose.

This conversation took place in Zurich in the run-up to Jürg Lehni's solo-show at Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm 2005.

COMPILER*03 – Arbeit/Work

Compiled by Cathérine Hug (Vienna) and Isabel Reiß (Zurich).

Produced by COMPILER/Tweaklab (Basel).

Designed by Turbo Magazine (www.turbomag.ch), illustration by Marcel Freymond,

Adrien Horni, Gil Pellaton, Venus Ryter, Jérôme Stünzi and Matthias Wyss (Biel/Bienne).

Translations from German into English by Catriona Shaw (Berlin) and Gregory Siegl (Zurich).

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130 minutes/Color/Stereo/PAL/4:3/No region code

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ISBN: 978-3-9522859-2-3

Distributor: COMPILER / kodoji press

www.compiler.ws / info@compiler.ws

COMPILER*03 has been generously supported by Christoph Merian Stiftung,
Präsidialdepartement der Stadt Zürich, Aargauer Kuratorium, and Tweaklab.