

Mobilization

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These quarantine times are also times of “smart working”, and the question arises as to what is “smart” about it. Let's start from an unquestionable point. As always happens, the current crisis is accelerating an ongoing trend, i.e. the transition from labour to mobilization that has been going on for at least twenty years, which has blurred the distinction between working time and living time (this was initially presented as the possibility of working as if you were on vacation, but of course it has come to signify that you *also* work on vacation). There are two ways to see this phenomenon, and they are not mutually exclusive. However, the first is confined to the past, while the second looks to the future.

I. The first consists in observing that capital is expanding its dominion by not even taking charge of the means and places of production, and this trend is decisively driven by the security requirements imposed by the virus outbreak. There is some truth in this view, as one can easily understand. The problem, though, is that it involves a scheming and plotting supernatural entity, i.e. Capital, or a modern Satan (wasn't it Marx who insisted on the Faustian character of Capital?). But the collapse of the stock markets, the unpreparedness of governments, and the general turmoil in progress should at least raise the legitimate suspicion that Satan was not quite on top of things and has failed to warn his followers in time so that they could take full advantage of the outbreak.

II. The second way, perhaps more complicated and a little longer to explain, does not involve Satan, but the human being. This view can give us not only hopes, but actual solutions for the future – a future that will obviously look very little like the past, since the current crisis is of an epochal character, bringing together the two great components of the world, souls and mechanisms, life and technology. Let's start from a simple observation: if computers could only be used in the office, at certain times and places, would we actually “live” at home, leaving computers behind? Of course not. At work, at home, and on the way between home and work, we always look at our mobile phones, both for work and for other reasons, and this is because mobilization is not a command that comes from outside, but the fundamental characteristic of every soul. In fact, every soul is driven by vital urges, be they the remote consciousness of death or the very near need to have lunch. We humans are particularly maladapted organisms, because we are slow to grow and poorly endowed by nature, but we have mechanisms to enhance our scarce resources. To put it succinctly, we are organisms, but ones that are related to a series of automata which they cannot do without, and that is why even when we could be inert *à la* Oblomov we tinker with our mobile phones instead.

The difference between organisms and automata is very simple. An organism has only two positions, on or off, dead or alive. An automaton, on the other hand, works serially: on/off, on/off, and so on, until the bulb burns out or the battery deteriorates. An organism has an internal purpose, its end is its end, so to speak, and in between there is life. An automaton has an external purpose: knives are made to cut, books to be read, fines to be paid. This mass of external purposes enrich the life of the soul, giving it a little more meaning (this is why pensioners often get depressed: depression is but the revelation of bare life, of the organism without automata), and this is why the human organism has so much need of automata, from clubs to fire to society to culture. But – and this is the main point – if we remove the organism, the soul, then the automata make no sense. Imagine the British Library or Times Square in a world without a soul (something that we can imagine quite easily today, as all souls are locked indoors).

III. However, let's get back to earth. Remote working is still the offshoot of a vanishing old world, a world where souls produce by using automata. But in the meantime, for about ten years now, automata have become capable of recording the souls' smallest gestures, recording them and replicating them. This is what artificial intelligence is. Instead of thinking that automata will take over (why should they? What would be the point? Despite their misleading name, automata don't run themselves, they need souls), and fearing that they will steal our jobs (that's what they are doing, but not fast enough, as this crisis would be much less serious in a fully automated world), let's try to look at the matter a little more carefully (not smartly – let's be wary of this term that always hides a catch). Big Internet platforms are huge automata that record the souls' smallest gestures in an exchange that seems fair (I give you free information, and you give me free information) but is not (automata can capitalize the information and translate it into automation and distribution, as well as profit, whereas souls cannot).

But automata cannot live and produce wealth (they have never produced as much wealth as they are doing at this very moment, when all souls are on the Internet) without souls. Automata need souls just as souls need food. And if souls die, automata are finished: therefore the survival of souls is indispensable, on pain of the end of all things, the end of time – total apocalypse. Of course, this only applies to the association of souls and automata – the rest of the world will get along great without us, but we won't be there.

IV. In conclusion, let me explain what the only kind of “smart working” is: doing nothing, “far niente”, that is, living, cultivating one's hobbies and interests, studying, writing, exercising and eating. Each of our acts, today, is recorded and produces value, precisely because it instructs the automata that live by imitating souls. This value must be redistributed, but first of all it must be acknowledged. Think of the groups that are most exposed today, namely all those who are employed and poorly paid. What can be done for them? Those who fought against automation, in their case, may have done so for the noblest of reasons, but ultimately caused their misfortune. And what will support the souls once they have been replaced by automata? Digital welfare: the taxation of the enormous surplus value that souls, by the mere fact of living, generate in their interaction with automata. I repeat: the great Internet platforms have never earned as much as they do today, and if we think about it, the answer to the questions “who will

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pay Coronabonds?" and "what is the EU doing?" is very simple: Coronabonds will be paid by the platforms, and the EU will collect the taxation and redistribute it in terms of welfare.

Welfare means freedom from material needs, but also from ignorance and prejudice – therefore, it also means culture, i.e. a resource that seems particularly valuable in these weeks of quarantine. If the virus, as is to be expected, ends up accelerating the ongoing processes, then so much blood will not have been shed for nothing. But for this to happen we need to be able to think of the future not as the projection of the past (that's what "smart working" amounts to) but as a radically new era that is coming forward unceremoniously, but that will really change the world, and change it for the better.

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