

# Takeover



The so-called digital revolution does nothing to change existing sociopolitical relationships. The unjust conditions remain intact and are even exacerbated by new methods of oppression and censorship. Now, they are being joined by new inequalities of access to the new technologies and the possibilities they open up.

The so-called digital revolution instead means an intensification of capitalist competitive mechanisms in postindustrial societies and economies. Since legal systems have not adjusted to the new, highly variable developments in conditions of ownership and ways in which producers and distributors of digital products conduct their business on a world-wide basis, these global players repeatedly succeed in employing cleverly devised horizontal and vertical integration and syndication tactics to erect quasi-monopolistic or oligopolistic structures and to get around national antitrust laws. Countries on the verge of economic take-off and developing nations thus continue to be almost completely excluded ex ante from the so-called digital revolution or, in certain cases, come to constitute labor pools for those multinational corporations that then practically colonize these regions and keep them under their thumb with licensing regulations and agreements that let the companies do pretty much what they please. Here, open source movements represent the only hope.

The so-called digital revolution is slow. No matter how much its technologies adhere to the myth of real time, its proliferation still takes forever in comparison to the radio, TV or the telephone due to the high costs involved. But there is one thing that it has accomplished very rapidly in the rich capitalist societies—digital technology has become an affordable mass-produced ware. And the skills acquired for recreational use have quickly become the basis for free enterprise, creative dilettantism, ambitious black-marketeering, etc. The industry that was aiming to dispatch whole swarms of digital manifestations to each and every household is now flailing desperately at these specters in the form of hacking, license piracy, DVD ripping, Napster successors, etc. Digital technology, once the exclusive possession of the elite in business, academia and the military, first became toy and typewriter, then, additionally, tool and research apparatus of purchasers and users who are in the process of taking things increasingly into their own hands. The upshot has been the emergence of new market participants who are tough to nail down by those in charge



of issuing business licenses and enforcing tax laws, who often collaborate internationally thanks to digital information technology, and finally, as independent proprietors of knowledge and the means to do business, have brought forth new employment relationships. So-called flexibles work as free-lancers or on a contract basis, though, in any case for a limited term, whereby both output-oriented wage models as well as the shifting of all social welfare risks and burdens onto the employee constitute the significant features of this development. The consequences include not only the increasing breakdown of solidarity between the enterprise and so-called independent contractor but also sweeping changes in the structures of individual sectors. For example, advertising agencies and film companies are being squeezed hard by competition from living rooms and tiny offices that, thanks to affordable equipment, knowledge and creativity, are able to generate those artifacts of the world of consumption designed to appear quickly, be ephemeral, and surf the crest of the Zeitgeist. Ultimately, digital technology has also become an instrument of production of aesthetic products with multiple marketing possibilities.

The author of these lines is part of this process. As a creator of extreme performance art and electronic music, he is linked to an international underground network that has set up its own structures and forums of production, exchange and presentation of content, technology, etc. beyond the confines of the regular art world and commercial entertainment business. The scene is characterized by mobility, flexibility, the spirit of cooperation, the pressure to innovate and a quick tempo. Art as the static expression of a bourgeois elite culture constricted into rigid forms is irrelevant. Performances in the venues of this elite culture serve to bring in cash to finance one's actual projects, though collaboration with these forums is not awfully attractive due to the sluggishness of their administrative machinery and decision-making structures. These actual projects are mostly self-financed; the necessary facilities and equipment are privately owned or borrowed from friends. Thanks to cheap digital communication, the realization of projects often features a division of labor that traverses national borders. In the author's case, financing is secured by paid performances and numerous well-chosen, small-scale, quickly completed assignments from agencies, club operators, and other clients in the private sec-

tor who are seeking information or readily-available and/or interchangeable graphic materials and who have earned the necessary respect. The clients want a particular style, not images with a certain degree of resolution suitable for TV, but a raw and consciously transitory aesthetic of computer-generated images that do not depict an already familiar environment but rather seek to peer into new realms. These graphics are the waste products of images for the author's own projects generated in the privacy of his home-brew studio on machines acquired with his own hard-earned savings running software that is unknown to or unused by commercial operations. Under no circumstances will his own projects be placed at the mercy of commerce. The knowledge for more demanding assignments is supplied by colleagues working on a very high technical level as freelancers in the advertising industry.

Private obsession and profession overlap, permeate one another, and coalesce in a permanent process of production and learning. If the style in demand becomes mainstream, sloshing into living rooms via play-consoles and TV commercials, if it becomes assembly line work, or if it finally just loses attractiveness for producer and customer alike, then the producer has already asserted mastery over a new technical and aesthetic level. Either he sells his output to new customers, takes a break, or tries to come up with new possibilities of making money.



The role of the author is ambivalent. Even with the at least indirect criticism of prevailing capitalist currents expressed in the first section of his essay, he is, in the way he earns his money and goes about his work, nevertheless a perfect product of this capitalist development, and even fosters it by displaying flexibility and doing without social and occupational security. He is in the meantime in the happy situation of being able to finance his lifestyle and his creative activities with creative work that is not totally foreign to his genre. He also sees his efforts to achieve

autonomy—and those of his colleagues going about this in similar fashion—as a convincing strategy to be able to defend himself and the structures in which he is active against destructive cooptation by politics and business, to reflect, and to level criticism at political and social developments. The author's works do not strive to be art; they are evanescent, and do not even survive that long on hard drives, since there is always newer and more interesting material on the way. The commissioned works, the info-trading for certain clients—they serve only to provide the financing for private incursions into that wild darkness lurking behind so-called human rationality and the financing for the opportunity to provide accounts of it to interested parties. "The true adventures are in your head." Hurrah!