

A Few Notes On The Social Machine

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“No matter how different, or even opposite the purpose: whether it be that of punishing the incorrigible, guarding the insane, reforming the vicious, confining the suspected, employing the idle, maintaining the helpless, curing the sick, instructing the willing in any branch of industry, or training the rising race in the path of education: in a word, whether it be applied to the purposes of perpetual prisons in the room of death, or prisons for confinement before trial, or penitentiary-houses, or houses of correction, or work-houses, or manufactories, or mad-houses, or hospitals, or schools.” –Jeremy Bentham, Panopticon Letter I [1787]

Make no mistake about it, we are being consumed. This eating and digestion of life—human and nonhuman—is perpetrated by a complex and diffuse system of inculcation and complicity that has been referred to as the social machine.¹ Comprised of states and their economic systems, their statistics, institutions, sprawling urban and sub-urbanism, it is the university system, it is the police, and it is you and me—it is the machine that tries to harnesses and ingest everything it touches. This consumption is the establishment and proliferation of the colony system for the consumption and reconfiguration of life for its preservation. The social machine is the heart of colonization that is not limited to a place in time, but is the projection of a specific relationship and vision that seeks to integrate and consume life past, present and future. Colonization needs loyal adherents, managers, and requires the continuous manufacturing of the timeless “Other,” either as the object of charity, fear, or both. This could take the form of the classic civilized/savage, legal/illegal, proletariat/non-proletariat and the state’s favorite criminal/citizen. These divisions are important as they form the rhythm of this machine and its intensities of monotonous suffering that condition our mentalities, the ground beneath us, and manufacture a system of perpetual double-binds, attempting leave no room for escape, just rearticulations and new definitions of freedom. The social machine raise the centuries old question, differing in phrasing over time: How is colonial rule/ the industrial state established, maintained and continuously able to grow? Here are a few notes from a perspective that seeks to challenge the positive social investments

¹ Dunlap, Alexander. (2014) Power: Foucault, Dugger, and Social War. In: COLLECTIVE B (ed) *The BASTARD Chronicles: Social War etc.* Berkeley, CA: Ardent Press.

of this machine that seek to confuse, implicate, and create self-identification in people with the existence of its colonizing processes.

The heart of the social machine is industrialism. The material form of capitalism in all of its divisive variants with liberal, planned, command, and neoliberal economies (etc), which are a substantial part of this amorphous machine operated by “Developed” and “Developing” countries and people alike.² This machine is big, it’s everywhere and is trying to implicate and consume all of us into its gears and some function, but this is not to say it is omnipresent—it can be fragmented and destroyed. Arguably and in a comparably ambiguous way this requires intimate personal reflection with the structures around us, the quality of life it enables, and finding *friends*³ that want to take on a joyfully anarchist praxis. At the least, reflecting and conversing on the failures of organizing people, reproducing state organizational forms and relationships as this is the substance and oppression inherent in the notion of “activist burn out.” This might look like people adopting a different set of values, or possibly an anarchistic set of values that will enable people to fight where they stand on their terms against this multiplicity of continuous attacks by this machine, its appendages and its army of lemmings.

This most certainly begins with Civilization, and can be seen to advance with the mechanical philosophers and their utilitarianism that sought to create an “*ideal perfection*” for society.⁴ The antithesis to this perfection is the deviations listed above by the well-known Jeremy Bentham, who was among many to articulate their obsession with a utopian order of geometric and moral perfection.⁵ Bentham’s solution to these social “disorders” was the Panopticon, a guard town with blacked-out windows, but more importantly a form of architecture that would reproduce God’s eye making people feel they were under constant surveillance by the guard tower, the doctor, the factory foreman or the teacher. Inspired by the military planning from previous centuries the Panopticon or more accurately panopticism is a technology that possesses the values and logic at the center of the social machine. As Bentham outlined, the highest priority of this technology was “*the person to be inspected should always feel themselves as if under inspection,*” extending to include “*the under keepers or inspectors, the servants and subordinates of every kind, will be under the same irresistible control with respect to the head keeper or inspector, as the prisoners or other persons to be governed are with respect to them.*”⁶ Hence the prison cells were called “apartments.” Nevertheless the crucial point is this:

In what other instance as in this, will you see the interests of the governor and the governed in this important particular, so perfectly confounded and made one? –those of the keeper with those of the prisoners—those of the medical curator with those of the patients? Clean or unclean, safe or unsafe, he runs the chance that they do: if he lets them poison themselves, he lets them poison him. Encompassed on all sides by a multitude of persons, whose good or bad condition depends upon himself, he stands as a hostage in his own hands for the salubrity of the whole.

While a liberal ideal, panopticism is trying to create a system and social terrain of mutual dependency—a hostage making system in which everyone one is implicated and brought into its

² These are these are State’s categories and terms that can illuminate the problem of States and industrial progress.

³ See Wolfi Landstreicher’s “Against the Logic of Submission.”

⁴ Bentham (1995 [1787] p.34 Also Plazzo in Foucault 2007

⁵ Romans, Aztecs, William Harvey, Descartes, Hobbes, **Ildefons Cerdà i Sunyer, and Haussmann** to name just a few.

⁶ Bentham, p. 44–5

order. Never forget, this internal control was introduced to people through abduction and overt violence of the newly emerging police apparatus that would abduct anyone they saw as vagrants, idlers and social enemies of the church, state, and its emerging economy. The response was to abduct and torture people into working—a process that required social divisions (woman/man, rich/poor, citizen/criminal) and the commodification of people and then land itself with the rise of enclosures.⁷ And Bentham among other knew very well this could only be sustained with dependency as he reminds us: “What other master is there that can reduce his workmen, if idle, to a situation next to starving, without suffering them to go elsewhere?”⁸ This is the name of the game that propels the social machine and its functionaries—starving people into complicity.⁹

In terms of warfare, after abducting people, beating them, and burning or sizing people’s homes you need to create enchanting and pleasant *carrots* after the stick of repression and discipline. This could be building new homes, sewage systems, education, computers or even your friends and family—this is a machine of perpetual hostage taking that has developed into a discipline with the rise of what is now called counterinsurgency warfare/policing techniques that attempts to turn your relationships into levers, while transforming flirtations, touch and charismatic personalities into weapons of integration and pacification into the webs of the social machine. Specifics aside, the general point of this conquest and colonization is to create a situation where dependency is established. The other side of the dependency as outlined beautifully by Guillaume Paoli is it also has to install addiction.¹⁰ What could be better to the industrial order than people’s perceived need and addiction to its sweets? What keeps the corporate careerists, police, and doctors going other than mythology of their importance, their complete and utter dependence for survival on work, and the cheap and expensive drugs ranging from donuts—hydrogenated oils, high doses of sugar, salt, etc (Mmmmm)—to mind numbering pharmaceuticals, which extends all the way to your favorite television show that you cannot miss! In the social machine we are all rendered junkies and prostitutes, jumping between and merging these roles—it is what keeps us and this machine going.

This work, which is the fuel of the social machine, needs you to learn to endure and like your work. Bentham knew that creating the possibility to allow work that was not completely miserable into the prison or the work-house could reinforced the positive lure of self-management writing: “But I neither see the great danger nor the great harm of a man’s liking his work too well; and how well soever he might have liked it elsewhere, I should still less apprehend his liking the thought of having it to do there.”¹¹ Once you can accept the work introduced to you and even better identify with it, and more so learn to derive meaning from it, you have been assimilated into the social machine and maybe there is room for your comfortable survival managing and policing others to keep with the perfection of things. Isn’t this the lesson of society and our personal goal of survival? Isn’t this how thoughtful and dangerous people end up cogs in the University system? Often, ‘we’—individuals—fail to find the space or alternatives we need, especially if the alternative is a circle of people who talk past each other and establish informal group hierarchies with any number of techniques to cut down and guilt each other, until we eventually integrate full-time into these gears—at least temporarily. So, I anticipate the droning

⁷ There are endless things written on this:

⁸ Bentham, 71

⁹ This starvation is not just material, but psychic and emotional.

¹⁰ De-motivational training

¹¹ Bentham, 57

mumbles and squeals as I challenge my own and everyone else's pleasures and social identities intertwined in this machine, is this assimilation all bad?

The alternative aside, dependency, addiction, and self-management seek to establish what has been called "*administrative decentralization*."¹² This is the decentralizing of hierarchical systems, the epitome of self-identification and belief in a particular, often unspoken, set of values that will spread the consumption process of the social machine. It is also the libertarian or anarcho-syndicalist trap that with the right ingredients, roughly: one part captured imagination, two parts addiction, and one part dependency can easily flip the slogan: "There is no authority but yourself" on its head to manage our own slavery with an ideology and identity that can reinforce it—no longer requiring intense coercion or the manager with a whip. Panopticism, by any means necessary, seeks to have people internalize a particular kind of authority that uses dependency and addiction that meshes with a criteria for punishment and reward. Administrative decentralization is the autonomy of complex gears or social processes of consumption and production that operate in synchronization with other complex gears within the framework of the state, while providing degrees of autonomy, feedback, and a sense of real and imaged freedom. Once people have internalized this logic and are dependent on the colony system, drinking the Cool Aid that sets the menu of predetermined pastimes, hopes, dreams and mass discourse propagated by the media-industrial complex that leads you into acquiesces with your environment. While on the other hand if an individual is to take up an insurrectionary or anti-civilization disposition then they are faced with a series of double-binds. And by no means do I mean to suggest these two camps—drinking Cool Aid and insurrectionary dispositions—are mutually exclusive. It is all part of the same tumble dryer.

Double-binds are the way this machine protects itself and holds everyone hostage. The entire social machine is an elaborate system to integrate and implicate everyone, by any means necessary and makes layer upon layer of double-binds that send the message to the those that are colonized and being colonized that "if you act against this machine in part or in whole in a tangible and material way then you will not make a single difference and you will be imprisoned or killed." While the other side of this double-bind is: "yes, things are really bad; people are dying, species extinct, and collapse looming, but you are alive and things are not that bad, and you can change this machine, make it friendly, more efficient and representative of the people." And of course there is the "who gives a shit discourse." In short, this double bind tries to capture the hearts and minds of people with *hearts* meaning "persuading people their best interests are served by your success" and *minds* "convincing them that you can protect them, and that resisting you is pointless."¹³ To even engage in the political system formally is to except the systematic double-binds that prolongs this social machine of death—Obama or Romney? [next season Hilary or Trump]—the machine continues. This is why anti-politics is advisable, this is why despite our formal and informal degrees in political science we need to destroy power and reclaim our own—take back our hearts and minds that have been colonized to the point that decolonization promotes a clever trick of administrative decentralization to accept and maintain the social machine despite the rotten racism/patriarchy/classism/industrialism inherent in this system.

¹² Light, JS (2003). From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, P. 184

¹³ Kill yourself David Killcullen (2006)

This double-bind could not be made more apparent with the total integration and dependency of humans on cybernetics/logistics. The veins of this social machine is logistics and it has become the life blood of humans as we are shuffle from box to box—house to bus to work to bar to park to supermarket to restaurant to movie; the cycle repeats. Almost the entire existence of the modern industrial human is resigned to a series of boxes that are completely dependent on logistics. The more this machine grows, the more vulnerable it feels or the more it wants to take, the closer it mixes our lives with its own structures, making us dependent on transportation, lights, air, food, sanitation, internet, the list goes on, but after all this machine serves us—right? That is why we are paralyzed by traffic, work, television, junk food, expensive hobbies, booze and it is through logistics, the third order of the art of war that dependency and addiction merge as one. Proliferating sickness that come in the form of entitlement, narcissism, insensitivity, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, industrial poisoning, elaborate drug habits and crippling dietary concerns—this machine is war, if only subtly and permanent. This extreme dependence that is regulated into people is making us needy, legislating and enforcing helplessness to the spread of the social machine, which is of course *if* we let it do it to us. The flipside of which, creates mind boggling entitlement and self-identification with something that is killing us, if not directly and immediately, then it is sapping our vitality and health to the point where any reference to “health” is completely distorted as there are more ill than healthy. Meanwhile the process of social emulation takes hold. Likewise, modern idleness has been reconfigured into a cadge of poison, insecurity and dependency on machines that require specific and specialized modes of work. Either way and no matter your take on these issues, which will be different in your respective contexts, the more we attack the logistics that propel this machine, the more we are attacking ourselves and our real and potential comforts that it seems people kill for. This is a double-bind to say the least.

The social machine has a place for rich and poor, criminal-citizen, women-men, black-brown, and (all) sexualities. Some positions in this machine are less miserable than others, but that is exactly what keeps us eating each other while this machine is eating all of us. This machine loves it when we love our work, especially after five hundred years of disciplining us and each other into loving it. Add some technophilia/techno-addiction to this work and it appears unstoppable, but it will never change the fact that it is bleeding us, our values, and our futures, subordinating us to a particular order, ideal perfection and regime of work. Let’s not forget that cable television was developed for three principle reasons in the 1960s: (1) to act “as a medium for citizen participation,” (2) “citizen-government communication,” and (3) “violence prevention” against widespread urban rebellion and race riots.¹⁴ However these three rationales had one endgame and that was to secure internal state-economic interests by developing a technology that would promote social integration with a constant propaganda for national politics, pre-manufactured debates and options, and later enchanting entertainment that served the overall purpose of social domestication and pacification. We have been taught not only to take the carrots, fight for them and see them as our own. When we work to create or have these enchanting carrots, it is within an architecture that has built-in trap doors—or double binds. If people are to ever to begin to uproot this thing and begin to genuinely decolonize—acknowledging the rotten form of this architecture and organization—and that means not taking the bait or at the least holding a tension against these technologies that are so good, so sweet and so pleasurable, so amazing it makes magic look

¹⁴ Light, Jennefer S. (2003), p. 182

like an outdated joke. Seeing the social machine as a colonizing machine that seeks to consume everyone on its alter of progress—for its continued growth and development—rendering hearts and minds to junky consumers with agency corralled into some form of prostitution might get to the systemic roots of the colonial process. In short, maybe the only carrots we should eat are the ones we grow ourselves and with our friends?

Either way, *Soylent Green*¹⁵ demonstrated *one* way industrial humans could start eating each other, but this machine is designed to consume and perpetuate itself using every facet of our being—our spirit, our sexuality, our desires, and our actions. This negative set of concerns is not intend to be righteous or helpless, but to recognize the extent to which we are all being formed by this machine, some in much worse positions than others, but we are still in it, taking its prescribed rolls, scrapping for assimilation and work that is bearable if not pleasurable,¹⁶ searching for dignity in its architecture, and worse we maybe forgetting how to live without this machines services, style of work, and how to enjoy free time without the insane plethora of “modern” conveniences. This is a quandary I face and symptoms I am experiencing and I share these notes: (1) the social machine is consuming all of us in different intensities, (2) it has been building an architecture over the centuries to keep people dependent and addicted, (3) it wants to induce pleasure and positive investments, (4) further it likes it when we like our work, (5) and finally we are a technology of this colonizing process, rebuilding and spreading its mentality. One way to think about this latter point are those scary robots in sci-fi movies that once they are blown-up, destroyed, and shattered into hundreds of pieces. People think they won the struggle against the machine, they begin to talk, celebrate and relax and then, after about minutes or so, the camera pans over to these shattered pieces on the ground. Slowly, they begin to wiggle, pieces start moving together, and wires start poking out and connecting to one another to rebuild this super robot. It is this wiggle and piecing back together that the industrial humans has been conditioned to serve, acting as the social machines reproductive technology and its feedback that will work out the kinks, improve growth and reassemble it back together and it is in these terms I think we should revisit the failed practice to take back our values and destroy these reproductive capacities of the social machine that we have been made to serve. Let’s loot the social machine take what we can and burn the rest and be conscious about what will constitute its reproduction.

—Xander

¹⁵ This is a fun 1973 dystopian film critiquing industrial humanity and its capacity to market industrial cannibalism in a time of crisis.

¹⁶ Picture someone in front of a computer with a light reflecting off their face as they type and click with a crazed and excited look, because that was probably what I looked like while I wrote this.

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