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# Their Sustainability Is A Disaster – Let’s Smash It

Coordination Hétéroclite pour l’Obturation  
des Systèmes Electriques = C.H.O.S.E.

2021

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Since the ‘70s, we’ve been told that climate change is a global environmental issue that needs to be solved on a global scale. That this “technical issue” needs to be dealt with some governance within which the ecological issue ends up recycled to become a global market. Therefore some people actively promote a Green New Deal. Nicely comforted by the fact that climate change is discussed in the infinitely numerous COPs [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg7*], they are congratulating themselves on the illusion that ecological matters are finally placed on the political agendas. We are not fooled by their declarations of intent and we have understood that the critique of greenhouse gas emission merely constitutes another technological evolution. We have witnessed how the carbon credit market was another excuse for companies worldwide to keep opening mines or fusing atoms, while being thanked for their “ecological commitment”. Indeed, tearing down forests for industrial mono-cultures, expropriating local populations and polluting the whole planet is well worth a nice green pol-

ishing isn't it? Exploitation & Protection are Essentially Two Sides of the Same Coin We could have been seduced by the "eco-responsibility" argument: and tried to act as "consumer activists", put some efforts into "sustainable development" and some other scheme that reduces our individual footprints. We then would have to pretend that we don't see the underlying class domination and oppression behind all these candid efforts for an ecological transition. So here is their "Sustainability 2.0"... The social and environmental damages caused by a fundamentally patriarchal and colonial capitalist system are being turned into simple technical issues, externalities that managers and engineers must account for in their plans and algorithms, so everything can remain business-as-usual. The technical world wants us to believe that the earth can be perfectly and totally controlled. The idea of an "energetic transition" could have charmed us, convincing us that it is possible to save the planet while fueling economic growth rate! Furthermore, the virtualization operated at every level of our societies that is supposed to make the transition possible, requires very real infrastructures that impact and pollute our environment, the living beings and our ways of relating to the world. We can't close our eyes anymore. Digital technologies are devastating and energy intensive: extraction of rare earth materials, industrial fabrication processes, data collection and transportation infrastructures, international logistical flows ... They wish to have us believe that the electrical greed of these technologies could be satisfied by the so-called energetic "transition": wind, solar, hydro as free and magical energy brought to us by the elements! Even better, the digital and electrical infrastructures would be complementary to each other. But this would require more data, more sensors and algorithms to feed the artificial intelligence that is becoming more and more important in our lives. Just like the market's invisible hand which is supposed to regulate human conflicts, the invisible hand of digital technology is supposed to make

the system more fluid and manageable by reducing reality to flows of encrypted data. It is a matter of optimizing the productivity of the earth and its inhabitants. By avoiding traffic jams, pollution and consumption peaks, inflations, suspicious behaviors, there would be no more obstacles to the continuous operation of the productive system and the circulation of its flows. No interruption, no intermittency: the electrical order ensures it. This is becoming the mandatory condition of life on earth. The very term “energy transition” is fallacious. While it assumes a shift from one energy resource to another, it hides a uncomfortable truth: the new ways of producing electricity (use of biomass, photo-voltaic panels, wind turbines, methanisation plants, etc.) are not only adding to fossil fuels, but they also rely on them heavily [*ed. – see ‘The Ecological Transition is a Hoax’*]. Whatever the Source, Electricity Production Contributes to the Ongoing Disaster We have been lulled to sleep with the refrain of slavery abolition and decolonization. However the energy market is largely owned by state backed multinational companies. Under the pretext of “pacifying” African territories, France continues to send its army to ensure the unimpeded extraction of uranium necessary to the “French energetic sovereignty”. Our Western, urban and technophile ways of living rely on a relentless extractivism. Industrial wind turbines, electric vehicles, smart-phones and computers depend on materials available in very low concentrations in the ground and whose extraction is therefore based on extremely harmful industrial processes. Local populations are exploited and poisoned, their environment is irremediably polluted. Deprived from the means of their own subsistence, they often have to flee toward cities and their urban surroundings. European companies like Vestas or E Énergies Nouvelles F implant hundreds and hundreds of wind turbines over thousands of hectares in the entire Latin America, showing the same voracity as their ancestors did with sugar cane and tobacco. It is hard to imagine

how violent these European companies can behave while taking ownership of places. From legal seizures to ecological damages, turning an inhabited area into an industrial zone necessarily implies robbing and oppressing local populations. In Mexico, political instrumentalization, bribes, corruption and involvement of armed groups are common practices, leading to murders when people resist. Their goal is to ensure “social acceptance”, and above all to break up communal ownership of land [*ed. – see the supplement to this chapter of Return Fire; ‘Centering Relationships’*]. Once private property is established, it becomes easier for companies to pressure isolated owners. It is a very efficient counterinsurgency tool, leading to tensions and conflicts. Local indigenous communities end up broken, while their ecosystems and associated ways of life are being destroyed. The social vacuum produced this way finally favours the domination of narco-trafficker. Through electricity industry, the French state (and also the Danish one [*ed. – like others*]) is shamelessly perpetuating colonization and is responsible for murders under the guise of global ecology. They try to make us believe that participative wind farm projects allow us to impact political decisions. That taking part in democratic energy projects would be the path to empowerment and autonomy. We are offered the opportunity to go to public consultations when companies ask for our voice, and to give our opinion about the location of new infrastructures. We are invited to install solar panels on our roofs and initiate our own wind farm project in our village. Everywhere, whether in industrial or in urban projects, it’s all about “participation”. It is clear to us that a wind turbine connected to the national grid and installed on our territory doesn’t lower our bill nor enhance our autonomy. We are fully aware that we depend on EDF [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg18*] and its subcontractors to extract, build, transport and install this wind turbine or solar array. That we still need them to maintain, dismantle and recycle those devices. We will have

nor a collective. It is a group of people who meet each other, coming from multiple horizons, determined to fight against the electric order and to cultivate energetic and political autonomy.

no control of this technology, no new practical knowledge, no autonomy. The electricity will be thrown on a high voltage distribution network, it will never be ours. Sold on the market, it will supply distant infrastructures that will in turn produce polluting devices. These processes only serve an illusion of democracy. When expropriations, expulsions and finally land grabbing happens, the mask falls off. Participatory renewable energy is only a democratic varnish to hide the lie of the energetic transition. If Electricity Seems So Essential to Our Way of Life Nowadays, it is Only Because We Have Forgotten How to Live Without It During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an important change in the history of energy occurred: industry shifted from using the living force of water, towards coal and its new converter, the steam engine. By the same time they dug it, the mine's worker-towns gushed out the bowels of the earth, right in the middle of the countryside. Completing the proletarianization of farmers, these cities kept transforming pastures into slag-heaps, turning hamlets into ghettos. Despite the fact that its extraction involves human and financial costs, the relocatable and storable aspect of coal made it the perfect energy to tame the proletarians: it allowed the centralization of production with a constant and regular rhythm, whereas the use of hydraulic force was necessarily organized on the periphery, depending on the fluctuations of water; which led to irregular working days. It was the time of the "Industrial Revolution", of the exodus of rural people, of the scientific organization of labor and its centralisation in factories designed on the model of prisons. As a real instrument of domestication, it ensured hierarchy and dependence of the workers. It was during this same period that the new science of "thermodynamics", emerged. It helped strengthen the growing industrialization, as it took part in building the concept of energy. The energy of bodies at work became the new standard by which energy would be measured and quantified from now on. In other words, this concept allowed to measure the work capacity of

all things, and turned the world into a vast flow from which it is possible to draw a production. It is now possible to compare a horse and a coal wagon, a river and a sunny plot of land, an oak forest and a pile of rubbish, according to an objective and quantitative criteria. From the ton of coal equivalent to the franc, from the kilowatt-hour to the euro, energy allows a direct economic equivalence. The electric network that appeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century visualized this homogenization. It transformed eclectic and capricious materials into homogeneous and manipulable resources. It was the basis for a promising investment: energy is the blood of industry, the nerve of war, the foundation of modern civilization. Time and space would now be subjected to the continuous temporality of production. The electric metastasis spreads, and becomes invasive. There came the time of Very High Voltage lines that conquered the countryside, in the direct line of their railway and telegraphic elders [ed. – see *Memory as a Weapon; ‘The Steel Road’*]. If these were among the first colonial infrastructures, making it possible to transport raw materials, the Very High Voltage (VHV) lines that appeared in Europe after WW2 were the renewal of these processes of colonization. Only that this time, as an internal colonization. Until the inter-war period, one could still find in the countryside autonomous systems of mechanical energy production, pumping and electric windmills, tide mills. Then the VHV lines invaded the countryside under the guise of “public service” and connected most of the energy uses to an increasingly centralized grid that squared off the territory.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, populations lost autonomy,

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<sup>1</sup> ed. – “As Thomas Hughes showed in his classic book, *Networks of Power*, electricity systems all over Europe and the Americas experienced a dramatic transformation in the first third of the twentieth century, evolving in scale from small lighting systems extending just a few city blocks to complex regional generation systems combining diverse power sources with extensive distribution grids operated with sophisticated managerial methods. Hughes explains this transformation as the result of a double process of

connection with other struggles, but also by accepting to be crossed by them. We have too often been asked to justify ourselves: “You are against nuclear and wind power? Very well, but what do you propose?”. This world is incoherent, absurd, we will choose neither SARS nor H1N1 [ed. – *two different recent epidemics*]! Their solutions are only new problems and we won’t be the technicians of their disaster. We don’t want to spend our time patching this system of death. The Thing attacks EDF, its electrical order, its infrastructures and its green propaganda. We seek to re-appropriate that which is controlled and managed by the force of the State and capital at the very heart of our lives. The power grids are essential to their supremacy and all the dominations that flow from it. We want to snoop, dig, investigate, to anticipate the destructive projects that the energy planners hide as long as possible. We will expose their abuses, their setbacks and we will fracture their soothing communication. We will show that we are capable of understanding in their smallest corners these networks which lock us up, that we are able to identify its breaches and to penetrate them with uproar. We won’t let them continue their techno-megalomaniac delirium without shame. Against wind industry, let’s build wind turbines! Let’s re-appropriate the know-how we have been deprived of, let’s take hold of these technical issues that they want us believe are too complex to understand. Let’s leave carbon neutrality to the status quo advocates and meet each other at work-camps and events... Let’s equip ourselves with sufficient technologies, let’s pass on the tools, the ability and the desire to overturn a harmful order. Because they are spread out, the infrastructures are weak and indefensible: pylons [ed. – see *‘It Is Still Possible’*], transformers [ed. – see *The ‘Green’ Farce Everywhere & Nowhere Else*], smart meters [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.4 pg36*] and concentrators, 5G [ed. – see *The 5G Net*] antennas: none of these energy nodes can stand without the consent of the population. The Thing is not a closed group

by accepting to walk into the unknown. We don't know how to live without the current way of producing electricity. Right now it's true that we are dependent on it, but it doesn't prevent us from fighting against what is destroying us. If today governments show an increasingly clear authoritarian drift [ed. – see *Capitalism & Electrification*], it's because they have to face social movements that questions their foundations: police [ed. – see *On Sexual Murder & Police Sadism*], patriarchy [ed. – see *Iranian Anarchists on Protests in Response to Police Murder of Mahsa Amini*], gender binary [ed. – see “*We Notice When Bigots Get a Win*”], racism [ed. – see *Lies of the Land*], colonialism [ed. – see “*Gállok is the Name of a Place*”]. We think that it's also time to tackle the electric order. Today, sitting around a table, we cultivate complicities while growing the dream of one Thing...

This *Thing* was born a long time ago in the past autonomous struggles. It appeared in the anti-nuclear struggles when one could still find there a radical criticism of the State and the army, before it was locked up in a purely ecological argument that today advocates the renewable industry. We could find it at the bend of collective workshops by re-appropriating knowledge and know-how. It opened squats, cultivated collective lands or made bread in refugee camps. More recently, it was found bunking a pylon, building houses or climbing in an occupied forest. It confronted this world directly by hitting the streets with joy and determination, leaving behind the reformists and their tools for controlling its anger. The roundabouts – during the Yellow Vest movement [ed. – see *Capitalism & Electrification*] – taught that a multitude of practices, encounters and jostling were underway, that the linking of all this, that the fact of accepting to be confronted by the other, far from one's political comfort, participates in a process of collective emancipation that is hardly recuperable by the system. For us, ecological struggles only make sense and can have an impact if they are carried out not only in

and “unproductive” spaces were put to work. Power plants imposed themselves in available rural spaces. Now industrial wind and photo-voltaic farms are intended to cover the smallest “unexploited” hectare. Technological networks are indeed closely linked to urban development. They are part of a logic that is historically determined by the principle of growth and the myth of progress [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.1 pg11*]. The heart of the metropolis is as smooth and gentrified as possible, painted, greened with a few new trees. It became the privileged place for consumption and absolute connectivity, while peripheral neighbourhoods saw the erection of housing blocks, industrial zones, electric transformers, garbage dumps and polluting industries... and the deployment of police repression. The counterpart of their beloved connected and smart city [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg31*] is the “safe-city”. Cameras are spreading [ed. – see “*Mobilising Disaster Relief*”], enhanced by big data: facial recognition and video fining, drones and movement detectors on the borders, thermal and infrared cameras, profiling on the internet and anticipation of so-called “abnormal” behaviour. Nothing should escape the omniscient eye of control technology. Multinationals, states and armed forces are working hand-in-hand to ensure this. Aristocracy and rich landowners already subjugated,

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*concentration*, led by technological innovation, and *centralization*, spurred by intercapitalist competition. The improvements in electricity transmission made possible the concentration of electricity production in increasingly large power plants (mostly, hydroelectric dams) supplying distantly located urban-industrial centers. In turn, this made possible a techno-managerial innovation in *load management*: the electricity produced through myriad technologies and resources was managed as a single load of bulk power, an undifferentiated magnitude to be maximized by adjusting it to the variegated end uses of electricity – private lightning, industrial power, urban transportation systems. In so doing, large electricity utilities were able to create economies of scale that expelled smaller, local providers from the market, creating the conditions for the centralized control of the electric system in fewer hands” (Power Struggles: Dignity, Value & the Renewable Energy Frontier in Spain).

educated, taxed and standardized agricultural practices. They forced mechanization, destroyed soil, provoked exodus, broke communities. Natural and social ecosystems in these peripheral areas didn't matter anymore. The agro-industrial model continued to optimize yields and allowed more land to be nibbled away with the help of petrochemical materials and genetic manipulation, as well as through land consolidation [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg34*]. Today, farmers are no longer peasants but industrial actors, armed with camera drones and calculation softwares for each square inch of land. Wind farm here, anaerobic fermenter there, solar panels every-where... They produce food no more, but energy; completing the general industrialization of the world. The centralization of energy networks leads to a loss of social and communal practices, while growing digitalization fosters individualism and creates a multitude of solitudes in place of our communities. We lost our interdependence links. For example, hydroelectric dams integrate rivers into the electricity grid for the sole purpose of producing electricity. This happens to the exclusion of other practices that used to draw a whole social organization within the watersheds. They related directly to the other beings sharing this environment: the river and its seasonal variations, the mills downstream, the fish... Electrification and intensification of flows also changed our relationship to time. If nothing should ever stop, the heterogeneity of biological, socio-cultural and ecological rhythms doesn't matter anymore. The only concern is about controlled and accounted time of production. We are indoctrinated by the concepts of optimization and yield. The digitalization of the world and the prostheses it requires generate new dependencies and modify our cognitive capacities. Now we access the world through machines. The 21<sup>th</sup> century's individual progressively let itself become a cyborg, achieving the dream of modernity with the transfer of the human to the machine [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.4 pg43*]. Human being is the last frontier to

overcome: she or he is not fast enough, not smart enough, too sensitive to affects; which legitimates the use of machines to think, predict and take decisions in his/her place. If we cannot separate the technological networks from the engineering thinking that gave them birth, it's because they are grounded on rationalization itself. They are the incarnation of "graphic reason", the way of interconnecting paths and mountains, lines and points. They are a perfect tool for a politico-military control of territories and flows; a perfect technological matrix now superimposed on the land; an interface between human bodies and technology; the vehicle of progress. A utopia that became true. It is not by chance that today RTE (the French energy net) is the star of their energy transition: its grids allow to turn all the territory into resources. As you hopefully have understood by now, we are not among those who are campaigning for a state of climate emergency. The decision-makers will not suddenly find themselves with a humanist streak. Above all, they are announcing that we will have to delegate to a centralised and paternalistic power the monopoly of the management of a new crisis that they have largely caused. The only answer given to all these crises, whether economic, security or health-related, is restrictive measures for civil liberties, violence, and brutal advances in the centralisation of political power. There is no reason to believe that the climate or biodiversity crisis will be any different. The ongoing disaster is not an engineering problem that could only be solved with technological solutions. It's not an external feature that managers should take into account and integrate in their algorithms to continue as if nothing was happening. In *The Thing* [ed. – '*Le Chose*' in French, '*chose*' meaning 'thing' but also in this case an acronym for *Coordination Hétéroclite pour l'Obturation des Systèmes Electriques*, authors of this piece (which appeared under the same name but in a different form in the French- and Spanish-language versions)] we assume that we have to go through the disaster