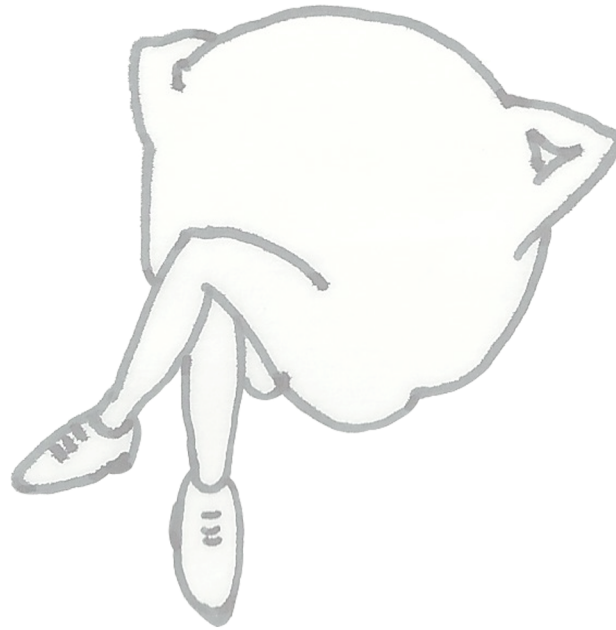


SUSTAINABLE LAZINESS



Margherita Potenza

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Reflections on the desertion of productivity

Margherita Potenza

Jewellery and Metal

Jonathan Miles

8700 words

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Introduction

*Lavorare con lentezza
Senza fare alcuno sforzo
La salute non ha prezzo
Quindi rallentare il ritmo
Pausa! Pausa! Ritmo lento¹*

This is a verse from the song written by Enzo del Re *Lavorare con Lentezza*², used as a theme by Radio Alice, a free radio broadcasting station that came into being in Bologna between 1976 and 1977. Radio Alice was a brief but important attempt to explore alternative forms of expression both as a dadist experiment and an episode of counter information. In the historical context of the late 60s', student protests and the coming of the '*anni di piombo*' where taking place, during which the strategy of tension took the place of mass demonstrations. The words of this song and their connection with Radio Alice suggest exactly the spirit that I would like to transmit with this collection of writings: the subject I would like to engage with is laziness, putting this concept in the perspective of the present time and propounding it as a sustainable behaviour rather than as a despicable inclination. The material I intend to lean on is various and issued from different periods in history, ranging from situationist

¹*Working slowly/without making any effort/health has no price/so lets slow down the pace/Break! Break! Slow pace.* Verses from *Lavorare con Lentezza*, Enzo del Re, 1974; translation by the author.

² See note 1.

pamphlets to economical theories to art critics essays, but all of them will support the development of a reflection on laziness as a right, maybe a necessity and surely a space for resistance. My interest in this subject has grown in the last few years, having found myself moving towards the grey area that in a student's life precedes the entrance in the 'real world'. I always depicted the advent of this moment with great anxiety, as its idea built in my mind as an ending point rather than a start. Having been born in Italy in the 90s I always confronted myself with a social and economical depression as the reality of my time, perceiving through the accounts of the previous generations a scattered nostalgia for the 60s economic boom – also known as the 'economical miracle'- and the social upheavals of the following years. The cultural revolution that characterised these decades finds its negative correspondent in the present national disenchantment with political activism and a consequential resignation with a social landscape stiffed in corruption and inequalities. Having turned the corner of the Two-thousands, the sight of an adult future was fatally paired with a mantra repeating that there would be no room for me; and now, as Ryanair immigrant that doesn't belong to either the category of privileged nor to that of the exploited I keep wondering in which case do I fit.

The wish to articulate a reflection on this precarious position and on possible ways out then arised.

The reason why I am opening this meditations quoting Radio Alice is because I think of it as a fitting example of how stepping away from the game's rules and playing your own is possible: disassembling the elements that forms the structure we are in allows us to clear the way for other solutions.

The group of students that participated to the making of the radio refused to stick to a passive position and looked for a tool of creation as opposed to production, the experience of which would form the community of individuals that made this parallel living exist.

In regards to the set of definitions that I will have to put forwards along the writing of these texts, I consider the example of Radio Alice to trace the separation between boredom and laziness: if the first is intorpidimento caused by passiveness, the second stands for the choice not to do what is meant to be done in order to have time for something else.

“Radio Alice, buongiorno, lunedì 26 gennaio, ieri nevicava, stanotte c’è la luna e il 31 sarà piena. Siamo sotto il segno dell’acquario e i nati in questo giorno sono tendenzialmente azzurri, con una spiccata tendenza agli scioperi felici...”³

This is how the first broadcast of the radio started off. Cheerful strikes, active laziness.

³ *“Radio Alice, goodmoring, Monday the 26th January, yesterday was snowy, tonight there’s the moon and it will be full on the 31st. We’re under the sign of Aquarium e those born in these days are naturally azure, with a marked tendency to cheerful strikes...”* Extract from the radio broadcast *Maurizio Torrealta racconta Radio Alice*, from *Wikiradio*, edited by Loredana Rotundo, Antonella Borghi, Lorenzo Pavolini and Roberta Vespa, 12/03/2012; <http://www.radio.rai.it/podcast/A42427960.mp3> (accessed 8th of March 2015); translation by the author.

In the following meditations I would like to assemble an imaginary place composed by a montage of recent and less recent cues where to develop a theory of systematic laziness, a space for wandering where laziness takes over the anxieties of failure for the future and actually turns into a beneficial choice. If already today we look at productivity as an ambiguous value, in the future sketch I would like to draw it will become the relic of the past century which we will have abandoned in order to survive.

Then the loafers, the artists, the anarchists and the daydreamers will have prepared the ground for a new social model of sustainable idleness.

I

"We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand we are obsessed with catastrophes: the whole life on Earth disintegrating because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the Earth, and so on. So the paradox is that it is much easier to imagine the end of all life on Earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism".⁴

The history of humanity has witnessed several times the falling of civilisations, always followed by the rising of new ones, as in the sequence of history's breath, moments of greatest expansion and prosperity are followed by contraction and stagnation. Looking back to Antiquity we could see a number of examples: the extinction of Egyptian civilisation after milleniums of ruling over the widest lands; the fall of Western Roman empire with the crumbling of its institutions under the pressure of barbarian invasions. In modern times, the ruin of the Ottoman empire faced with European colonialistic ambitions, or the vanishing of the Soviet Union into political emptiness and decline. For as much as human systems can seem timeless, insurmountable and unmovable, History's lesson is that every form of social organization is finite, as the way people structure their communities must adapt to the constant evolution of time.

From a macroscopic perspective these moments can be considered as part of the natural process of historical cycles' renewal, but from a microscopic point of view, a subjective

⁴ Slavoj Žižek in *Žižek!* dir: Astra Taylor, 2005

position, these are dramatic times: those who spend the span of their lifetime during these periods have to witness the final stage of a system that is degenerating, leaving behind itself an emptiness that will take time to be filled with a new identity. The remains of a recent past still take up the sight and what could come next can not yet be seen.

Today we witness the ending of the liberal capitalistic system and we live through the most extreme expressions of this decay: globalised financial capitalism and the culture of hyper-consumerism. The strategies that feed this degenerating machine are striking in their absurdity to everyone of us: the programmed and 'acclerating' obsolescence of technological devices, the capillar spread of advertising forms and the systematic recourse to credit and indebtedness as the only way to bear with the speeding pace of the cycles of production and consumption⁵. The side effects of these tactics as well frighten us for their brutality, but never enough to trigger an appropriate response: the periodic debit crisis in Greece that systematically gave rise to political crisis and thus to the green light for international sacking; the seasonal recurring of environmental emergencies such as typhoon, flooding, heatwaves, everytime more virulent and yet less sensational for our opinion; the apperance of ever-increasing violent reactions to the ideological model of capitalistic societies that flow into open conflict between West and East, North and South, clearing the way to all kinds of demagogic manipulation.

⁵ Serge Latouche, *Tossicodipendenza da crescita*, p. 26. In *Piccolo Trattato sulla Decrescita Serena*, (Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008)

In this historical moment we can see the symptoms of collapse becoming more and more evident and yet we are not able to engage in a radical change as we can not imagine a possible alternative to what has been the main track of the last 300 years of our history. Confronted with this hostile empassé it seems easier to imagine the end of the world rather than that of the capitalistic epoch, as Slavoj Žižek suggests in the documentary movie *Žižek!* by Astra Taylor.⁶ The Slovenian philosopher has articulated an interpretation of our contemporary disfunctional condition as a process analogous to that of grieving: before getting to the final stage of acceptance we are making our way through various psychological phases: starting from the stage of *denial*, in which we still believe in the utopia of liberalism as the theoretical formula capable to solve any problem inherent in capitalism; the stage of *anger* as violent reaction to our post-ideological era, where identifying representations like religion give us the occasion to formulate the commitment to a higher ethical ideal; that of *bargaining*, pinpointed in the inadequacy of the marxist concept of exploitation confronted with the reality of cognitive labour; *depression* as the definition of the 'post-traumatic' modern subject, who has internalised the experience of capitalism's violence (wars, natural catastrophes, economic crisis).⁷

Franco Berardi rather explains this last phase as a psychopathologic phenomenon that he calls '*the collapse of the*

global mind'.⁸ The social and cultural effects of financial capitalism are revealing themselves in what Berardi defines a '*trend of mass-suicide*⁹': beyond the topos of suicide that our collective imaginary matches with islamist fundamentalism, Bifo says that "...[aggressive suicide] must be seen as a declaration of end. The suicidal wave seems to suggest that human kind is out of its time-limit and that desperation has become the main attitude toward future."¹⁰ Lastly, with the publication of the MIT research *The Limits to Growth*¹¹ since 1972 we have the scientific proof that our society, anchored on growth as its only propeller, has deteriorated the ecological balance of the planet to a point where the prospects of an uncontrolled collapse in economy, industry and consequently population is increasingly realistic. According to the team of dynamic systems experts led by Donella Meadows, the mechanisms of beliefs and practices that forms our reliance on growth as a universal solution to the problematics of our society clashes against the evidence that the space and resources used to fuel that mechanism are finite. As illustrated by the 1992 and 2004 updated editions the 'society of Growth' has already reached the stage of overshoot since the 1980's, meaning that our use of the world resources has exceeded the actual capacity of the planet to supply new materials and

⁸ Franco Berardi, *Che significa oggi autonomia?*, 2003, <http://www.republicart.net/#> (accessed 8 May 2015); translation by the author.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth*, (New York, Universe Books, 1972)

⁶ Slavoj Žižek in *Žižek!* dir: Astra Taylor, 2005

⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the end times*, (New York: Verso Books, 2011).

energies. To avoid collapse humanity should have taken a drastic turn to slow population growth, limit material consumption and invest in technology to reduce the impact of pollution, but this did not happen with the necessary proportion and rapidity. The social-economic system that now rules the world will indeed have to be abandoned, whether we will be on control of this shift through the 'sustainability revolution'¹² or we will let the natural balance re-establish itself by its own dramatic means.

So, how to survive in this seemingly hopeless landscape? Will we sink with the ship of liberal capitalism without having dared to challenge it? Will we accept this poisonous heredity with resignation? We do find ourselves to live in the end times, but since the Apocalypse Knights' horn has not sounded yet, we still have room to imagine what could come out of the farewell to capitalism. Putting aside the millenarian fashion we are surrounded by, what we urgently need is a new formulation of our historical condition in order to be able to act within it and not to be oppressed by this global manic depression. Paraphrasing Berardi's words, we have been looking up to a system grounded on futurisation, debt and economical promise. Now that promise is over¹³. So what is next, if we dismiss the option of final judgement?

¹² Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, *Transitions to a Sustainable System in Limits to Growth, the 30-year update*, (White River Junction, Vermont, Chelsea Green, 2004)

¹³ Franco Berardi, *Manifesto of Post-Futurism*, 2009, <http://eipcp.net/n/1234779255> (accessed 8 May 2015).

II

21/06/2015

Milan

Outside the building of Brera 2, in the working-class corner of the northern side of the city, I met with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, who accepted to have a chat with me about his research on the subject of laziness. In between one session and the other of final controls with his students, we made use of his launch break to talk. Walking to the cafeteria, I explained him the initial question that drew me to the subject of laziness and unproductivity: how someone who chose to make art as his/her main activity can justify the fact that he/she willingly does not produce any kind of consumable good or service? How do you explain the choice of unproductiveness? Can you defend laziness?

~

Starting from that question, which was my main concern, this theme developed into three directions: the first one is the idea of laziness as an act of resistance...

Mh, resistance to what? ...Because by saying that laziness is resistance – and I completely agree – you are opening the

matter of work, which is the real subject when you talk about laziness.

Exactly. I think the angle with which someone my age sees the question is that we find ourselves in a historical period that puts us in a very frustrated position toward productivity and work: as individuals that will never have a fixed job and will not benefit from the guaranties that belong to another time in history, it is like we were asked to be productive and be part of the system without ever actually being able to fit into this producer role. So the idea is, through the subjects of non-productivity and refusal of work, to find hints that are not passive but proactive toward the ideal development of a new operating principle. Knowing that the capitalistic system we live in will, at some point, collapse on itself, which could be the arguments for a new mode of operation?

How come you are using the expression 'refusal of work'?

Because I read your books! In the research I did to introduce myself to this theme I came across a number of titles connected to Bob Black and other anarchist thinkers. For me the matter is linked in quite an interesting way to a more technical debate as Latouche and Bonaiuti's theories of Degrowth¹⁴ and the research that inspired them, called

¹⁴ Serge Latouche in his essay *Piccolo Trattato sulla Decrescita Serena*, (Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008)

***the Limits of Growth*¹⁵, which was carried during the petrol crisis of the '70s, and then updated in 2013. The research analyses the future scenarios that will take place if we keep the same pace of production and suggests possible solutions. Let's imagine for example that the world population will saturate and there will be no place left for the new borns, what could we do? Or let's say that the agricultural production will collapse due to a lack of space, or maybe the problem will be the level of pollution... these are the kind of problematics to which the researchers tried to give an answer. The gist of this research is that one way or another we will have to dramatically slow down the pace with which we produce, and from that conclusion Latouche developed his theory on how the concept of growth as an economical goal does not work anymore.**

Not even from the ruling politics' point of view, so much so that growth and occupation are the declared aims of governments all over the world and are the target that no one gets to reach, even if they pretend they do: there is the attempt to show that growth and employment are recovering, but it is not true. There is a pumping-up of politics that artificially create employment, but it does not corresponds to an actual expansion as it was in the 30s. After the great crisis of '29 the margins of growth' relaunch really existed, even though they were linked to the war; while today not even war - which is there, is happening and is destined to expand - can produce the effects of a real come back. That is because war today

¹⁵ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth*, (New York, Universe Books, 1972)

mainly depends on the improvement of technologies, which do employ work, but mostly cognitive work.

The reason why I wanted to have this conversation with you is that while writing the first texts for this dissertation I came across your *Post-Futurist Manifesto*¹⁶ and other writings of yours in which you confront the concept of cognitariat¹⁷, meaning the way the generation that enter the professional world nowadays relate to the choice of productivity and non-productivity.

In the last period I started working again on what is a slightly disregarded theme, which is that of the depletion of the need for work. A theme like yours, laziness, can actually be approached from two perspectives: one is that of laziness as a feature of dandism, decadent, symbolist, as the pleasure of dissipation, which is an absolutely deserving intake, but maybe a bit marginal in political terms; the other is that of usefulness of non-work, or better, the uselessness of work.

Another point I would like to take into account is that of laziness as creativity. If we identify the contrary of productivity in creativity, how could laziness and creativity link?

Here as well, there is a very interesting aspect that is the ambiguity connected to the word 'creativity'. Ultimately, we

¹⁶ Franco Berardi, *Manifesto of Post-Futurism*, 2009, <http://eipcp.net/n/1234779255> (accessed 8 May 2015).

¹⁷ Franco Berardi, *Che significa oggi autonomia?*, 2003, <http://www.republicart.net/#> (accessed 8 May 2015)

can have two concept of creativity: one is that of the advertising agency or the aggressive businessman that says “You must be creative! Because that makes my profits grow”, where creativity is a function in the process of inner production of value. Another is creativity as imagination of a paradigmatic change, the imagination of a world where the creative injunction wanes, where we’re not forced anymore to be falsely creative and we are then finally productively lazy, so to speak. As a consequence, the focus of your research is also its weakness, because you’re always inbetween a purely ‘fashionable’ argument – laziness as a gadget, or as a space of non-work paid by someone else’s work, therefore the space of luxury – while on the other hand you have the possibility to overrule this topic in terms of freedom from work obligation.

Indeed, there are two main spheres: one more universal that links to this histrocial period, and another more personal, in which I consider the concept of laziness-as-creativity to be leaning on the matter of time division, understanding laziness as a way to re-possess our own time as human beings. And that’s where the question of work refusal comes in.

Do you know Bataille? The concept used by Bataille is that of excess, or waste¹⁸. He gets to see this double meaning of the word, the excess as something merely superflous or excess as

¹⁸ for more specific informations: Georges Bataille, *La Part Maudite* (Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1949); Georges Bataille; Alan Stoekl (edite by), *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Minneapolis, Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1985)

soemthing that goes beyond the condition in which we are forced to be pointlessly productive.

Also, being in London the subject of this dissertation seemed even more relevant: London is the total expression of productivity uselessness.

London is hell from that point of view.

In regards to myself, I have recently been thinking of something focused on the topic of unemployment explosion, something that is seen as an extreme danger, while it is actually the sign of a possibilty we are not catching. Citizenship income, for example, could be a tool to free society from the salary obsession. We don’t need a salary anymore, just as we don’t need work anymore. It is now socially possible to arrange the conditions for a progressive reduction of work time, which is by the way a totally realistic political program: a work time reduction’s program has been applied in Sweden. France also tested similar experiments during Mitterand’ government in the late ‘90s – it didn’t work for various reasons. The point is that people are terrorised by the idea of being able to live without having to work.

Of course, because then you give space to...

Truth is that it’s the misery of existence that compels us to be productive, but at the same time, being compelled to productiveness, existence became compeltely miserable: we’re caught in a trap from which it is difficult to escape, but I think the effects of the crisis will force us to confront this situation. One months ago the *New York Times* published an article about

*fake companies*¹⁹: in many European countries, especially France, companies and factories have been created where people go at 8 in the morning to work, and everything seems to be real, but is actually completely fake. You go, use the copy machine, use the computer, send e-mails, and the address to which you are writing is fake, the bank that is giving credit doesn't exist... But, in order to allow people to do something, to keep this illusion and stay fit, so to speak, 8 hours a day you can go and work for a fake company.

The hamster's route!

Exactly. It's an appalling article. Another one, entitled *The Conundrum*²⁰, talks precisely about this, the exhaustion of the necessity to work and its imposition. The *Fragments on Machines*²¹ by Marx is a text that I really suggest you read. It is a complicated text, as Marx sometime is, on the function of general intellect or cognitive work, as a factor for technologic production' growth and on how this growth could make the reduction of work time possible, until its extinction is reached. It's the most brilliant and forward-looking of Marx' writings, undoubtedly: if you want to understand why Marx is a contemporary author read it, the rest isn't necessary. The core

¹⁹ Liz Alderman, *In Europe, fake jobs can have real benefits*, *New York Times* (May 29th 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/business/international/in-europe-fake-jobs-can-have-real-benefits.html> (accessed on 26th September 2015)

²⁰ Franco Bifo Berardi, *The Conundrum*, unpublished.

²¹ Karl Marx, *Fragment on Machines* in *Gundrisse*, (London, Penguin, 1993), pp. 690-712.

of this book is the model he imagines for a post-capitalistic development. It's the only piece of writing in which Marx says what could be the end of Capitalism. In all his other writings he explains what Capitalism is, while in here he says which trend of overcoming has been triggered by Capitalism itself.

Another thing I wanted to ask you about concerns the experience of Radio Alice...

Well, of course the topic of laziness has an aesthetic side, and existential, erotic aspect, meaning the concept of life liberation: Radio Alice was focused on this subject, the pleasure of life freed from work.

And this way we return to the initial question: why making art and not being a broker?

Exactly. There is a documentary called *Piccolo Gruppo in Moltiplicazione*²² made by this director from Bologna, Manuele Angiuli; I participated to its preparation. The documentary is focused on a magazine called *A/traverso*²³, which has been the magazine of '77 so to speak, and was very dedicated to the subject of the end of work and post-creative crativity, meaning creativity as liberation and not as production. I think the documentary is a good introduction to this theme.

Yes, I am really interested in finding contemporary reflections on this subject, possibly made by people that

²² Emanuele Angiuli, *Piccolo Gruppo in Moltiplicazione*, 2015

²³ *A/Traverso*, Bologna: self-published by Franco Berardi and Maurizio Torrealta, May 1975-November 1987

actually live in this historical time. I heard you talking about Occupy before; do you know any analogous, contemporary experiences to Radio Alice?

It's hard to say. Somehow yes, because the whole media-activism experience contains that virus which keeps producing effects, but it seems to me that the consciousness of the centrality of this theme has been lost. A theme that is, I think, so urgent today... it is more important than the Third World War, but people struggle to recognize that. We complain a lot about unemployment, precariat, etcetera and still we don't realize that is not the problem, work uselessness is the problem. But this, conceptually wise, requires a few passages that seem to be hard to make today.

I think generally we lack a formulation of what is going to happen next, we're really concerned with the mess that comes with the end and not focused yet on future solutions.

Or maybe we could say that the possibility is still here, but we can't see it.

III

16/06/15
Milan

On a sunny afternoon of early summer I meet with Costanza Candeloro, an artist from Bologna who I asked for an interview on the subjects of non-productivity, resistance, creativity and autonomy. We start our conversation talking about the Universal Exposition opening in Milan and the protests that followed this event.

[...]

What strikes me is that, comparing the no-Expo movement²⁴ with other experiences like Autonomia or Radio Alice²⁵, a quite distressing picture arises concerning this historical period: all these are completely passive behaviours that burst into episodes of violence and do not have any kind of constructivity. The 70's saw phenomena like the self-reduction of rents, the occupation of unrented spaces, etc. I do not think that the people who took part to them had intellectual tools that we do not have today, but the moment they found

²⁴ <http://www.noexpo.org/english/>

²⁵ https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomia_Operaia ;
<http://www.radioalice.org>

themselves confronted with urgent issues – too low wages, inaccessible rent in downtown areas, the marginalisation of lower classes and the forming of social discomfort in cities' outskirts, etc – they found the way to give themselves solutions. It did not end up well, but still what matters is that they found the space to create an alternative. Today we can not see such a thing.

[...]

The absurdity is that when Expo still was on a planning stage you could already foretell this invasive structure which would have hit the city, and it was already revealing itself as pure speculation. On the other hand, the counter-argument to criticism toward Expo was: 'If we want economy to grow back this is the way to go; we will attract investors, create new job opportunities and let a stream of money into our territory and this way the city will thrive again'. But the scenery we saw at Expo's opening was absolutely unaltered, stagnating and well far away from the growth talks we had been sold. In fact, they asked the inhabitants of that same territory which was meant to flourish to take part to this event as volunteers, working for free. Like some sort of tragicomic play!

For me the very existence of Expo is absurd. Eventually, it will not bring any substantial addition to the area that it invested. It is an enormous, completely anti-functional expense, confronted with this historical and political context. An omnipotence delusion. The only reason why something like that can exist is because it is part of a political mechanism for which it is important to send out this message. Expo is a religious performance. For as much as it is established by

functionalist structures and it should hence have a practical function, it is a completely anti-practical event and only has a religious aim: the 'adepts' working for free perfectly fit into this mentality, all the money spent to build this sort of temple... Ask somebody who was favourable to it 'what is Expo for?': nobody knows, nobody talked about it. Even in terms of advertising, nobody said 'this will be useful'. It is a purely religious event, that feeds on the trust on dominant politics and was conceived to strengthen it.

[...]

So what could be the way to sabotage a mechanism like Expo? In my writings on laziness and non-productivity the thought I drive forward is that as we find ourselves in a depressed economic situation in which the capitalistic system is running ashore we will soon need to start arguing on the creation of a new system.

To give birth to the post-human! (Laughter) I recently saw a beautiful talk on this subject by Carlo Vercellone, a writer²⁶. He was talking about neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism and what could overcome all this and he was suggesting post-humanity will.

At some point we will stop eating so we will not need to work anymore! (Laughter)

Exactly!

²⁶ the talk was held at the Politics and Economics Department of Bologna University by Carlo Vercellone during the spring of 2015.

Approaching more specific texts concerning the consequences of economic development, there is different studies that come to the conclusion that this system – for which production and growth are imperative – will exhaust itself and in order to survive in this environment we will have to reduce our production and consume what we stocked so far. From these considerations I started a reflexion on how to articulate the opposite of production, and I thought of non-productivity as a role, a model. At the same time you can also see the opposite of productivity as creativity, being an activity that does not produce consumable goods.

That is actually what I wanted to answer when you asked 'What can we do about it?'. The solution is not consecutive to the issue but preceding to it. That is because the question of production, just as the question of religion, sets itself on a number of human weaknesses that are a fertile ground for this kind of phenomenons to ramify. Bringing this concept on a personal level I tell myself that these processes show up wherever there is room for them. Take myself as an example: speaking of Expo, I have never been linked to it, so I never had to face the issue whether to work on something connected with Expo or not. I have never been offered to! And that is not because I am the most upright person who lives on a planet that is immune to all this: my immunity resides in the fact that I am completely excluded from the system of production because I am not making a penny: all the signings I get – alas – are unpaid, so nobody funds them. By not earning anything I am out of the system and this way I never find myself connected to this realities. So the question of non-productivity

and idleness fits perfectly in my frame. I know that by not earning money I am never brought to that kind of environment - and by not being part of it I am not earning money.

The issue of having to choose whether to be part of not of an event that can not be avoided, that is true only for someone who already is part of this circuit. That is why non-productivity and creativity can go hand in hand toward another kind of production: non-productivity in a specific system of production but activity toward another.

Do you know any project that moves toward that direction?

Yes, they already exist. For example, I recently started a small research: there is a squat in Bologna called Atlantide²⁷ which is a center run by these lesbian and feminist girls, and I got interested in them since I find their work of criticism and activism beautiful. I then looked for similar realities: I got informed about the Houses for Women circuit²⁸ in Italy, other feminist collectives, and I realised that there is a web of associations which work with the aim of offering daily services to people in a completely autonomous and very quiet way. You just need to start looking for them and you will find all sort of groups working silently and yet very useful and practical, carrying out something much more functional than Expo. [...] The relevance of these realities does not come from the absence of similar structures, but from the fact that they exist

²⁷ <http://atlantide-resiste.blogspot.co.uk>

²⁸ a circuit of independent women counseling clinics, women's shelters and cultural centres that offer a range social services for women.

as alternatives. Non-productivity lies on this: to respond to the same necessity but in an autonomous circuit, anti-productive as it does not produce the same results as the other. To give the same thing but through a different mentality: if I had to choose an exhaustive term I would call this a creative mentality, as opposite to conservative.

Aside from these universal arguments which touch upon economic and historical issues, there also is a more personal, intimate aspect that concern the use of one's time: how people make use of the potential that comes with their lives. In your situation for example your activities are unpaid, and gives you the freedom to choose how to spend your time, since it is not tied to a monetary relationship. Concerning your position, how do you relate to the subject of non-productivity as creativity and how do you think that could be expressed in a new system?

If I think of myself, I live with very little money, I have a very restrained lifestyle and yet I am not lacking of anything, so I find myself in some sort of ideal position as I do not depend on this financial scarcity. [...] People like us, who are part of the middle class are anyway equipped with a patrimony and that allows us to access resources which can be expended to create new realities. The possibilities that our social context offers us – as having a house and not missing anything for what concerns our primary necessities – give us the means to create the alternatives to that context. We do not necessarily have to reproduce, conserve this patrimony; we have the possibility to involve it in another project, different from the mere prosecution of our life. The best part of us has or is able to find the resources to be unproductive: the moment you stop

worrying about your micro-reality you realise it has a whole set of supports that can be exploited.

But when you face the way you sustain yourself, do you also consider the freedom of time that this condition offers? The moment you would chose to get a 'plain job how would you then see the concept of productivity linked to the possibilty of expressing your potential and giving it to others? What is at stake here is the question of chosing to spend your life making art or not.

I always told myself, in a slightly utopian way, that the true revolutionaries have always been artists. In the broadest meaning of this term, Marx has been an artist. I think of personalities who have been truely able to create new worlds, new languages, new forms of expression: when speaking of building a counter-path artists already have the right tools. True creativity always has a social function, even without claiming it, as it is the expression of a freedom that other pathways can not give us. It is a kind of creation that is never an end in itself.

[...]

And what if you had to imagine a fictional scenario of liberation, where everyone can do whatever they want, whenever and however?

The Apocalypse! (Laughter) I imagine it as a positive circumstance, not a negative one; not a catastrophe but a solution in peace.

IV

“The true utopia is to believe that the existing system can reproduce itself indefinitely; the only way to be truly realistic is to think what, between the coordinates of this system, cannot but appear as impossible. How are we to prepare for this radical change, to lay the foundations for it? [...] What is therefore needed to day is a refined search for ‘signs coming from the future’, for indication of this new radical questioning of the system”²⁹

Coming back to the preoccupation that first inspired this reflexion on laziness and the employment of time – how to justify the unproductiveness of an artistic practice? – I wonder if it could be linked with the awareness of the necessity of a dramatic shift in human society in order to preserve the fundamental condition of our inhabitation of the planet.

The authors of *Limits to Growth*³⁰ reflect on the facts that one of the reasons why we have blindly committed to growth so far is because we have considered it as the sole effective answer to social issues such as poverty and unemployment. But in order to define a vision that offers more than ‘mere physical

expansion and accumulation’³¹ the authors argue for concepts such as sharing, sufficiency and solidarity to be the key of a new system of thought for humanity.

“How, in practice, can anyone attack these problems? How can the world evolve a system that solves them? That is the opportunity for creativity and choice. The generations that live around the turn of the twenty-first century are called upon not only bring their ecological footprint below the Earth’s limits, but to do so while restructuring their inner and outer worlds. That process will touch every arena of life, require every kind of human talent. I will need technical and entrepreneurial innovation, as well as communal, social, political, artistic and spiritual invention. [...] It is one [task] that will challenge and develop the humanity of everyone.”³²

The first step to be taken in this direction is that of a ‘decolonisation of the imaginary’, to use Serge Latouche’s expression³³, meaning to destructure the dominant concepts and rules in which our behaviour is enacted, and to give breath to the formulation of new solutions for living. This process of ‘decolonisation’ has in fact already taken place: an example of it could be the movement of Occupy Wall Street and the number of affiliations that followed in other cities around the world. The phenomenon of OWS links efficiently the concepts of

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (New York, Verso Books, 2011).

³⁰ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, *Limits to Growth, the 30-year update* (White River Junction, Vermont, Chelsea Green, 2004)

³¹ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, *The sustainable Society in Limits to Growth, the 30-year update*, (White River Junction, Vermont, Chelsea Green, 2004)

³² *ibid.*

³³ Serge Latouche, *Piccolo Trattato sulla Decrescita Serena*, (Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008)

creative practice and shared action as tools to question the establishment, draft tactics for alternative living and re-appropriate communal space. Art making as an unproductive occupation has been one of the core strategy of the movement to encourage the participation of all citizens, reclaim the urban space size by financial entities and feed the debate around alternative ways of living. The successful connection between these aspects and the revival of the practice of carnivalesque is probably the reason of the popularity that the movement gained on mass and social media³⁴. The tradition of carnivalesque³⁵ is indeed a focal element in the strategy of decolonisation, as it provides a background of experiences from which present experiments can foster themselves. The frame of carnival as a medium for emancipation and a catalyst of civil disobedience through chaotic humour gives a stage to the participants of these happenings to experiment and formulate possibilities that would be considered impossible in other contexts. The participatory element is pivotal for the

³⁴ Tancons, Claire *Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest sensibility*, *E-Flux* (issue 30) (12/2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/occupy-wall-street-carnival-against-capital-carnavalesque-as-protest-sensibility/> (accessed 27 September 2015)

³⁵ The term 'carnavalesque' refers to Mikhail Bakhtin work *Rabelais and his World*, where it is used to define a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumption of the dominant style through chaos and humour. Literary carnivalesque is likened by Bakhtin to the activity of hierarchies reversal that takes place in popular culture's carnivals. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Indiana University Print, 1984)

carnavalesque functioning of these events, as it allows to break the barrier of the spectacle and make way for new forms of aggregation: individuals can discover again their power and influence in the context of collectivity. This way the dissent toward the dominant ideologies can be formulated not as a refusal, a violent reaction or an isolation but a proactive, creative and shared gesture. Given ideas and truths are tested, fixed scripts of behaviour are suspended, creating the occasion for a reversal of hierarchies. This is thus a fertile ground for the development of bottom-up tactics and the imagination of original forms of disobedience: the spectators of this scenario of failure that our present time seems to be can leave their seats and take part to the devising of a different prospect. Here comes into play the notion of time. The cycle of production, consumption and waste is funded on its compartimentation, and time is therefore an essential element in the process liberation from this forced circuit. In order to achieve a new vision, a new temporal perspective is needed. On February 2009 Franco Berardi published online the *Manifesto of Post-Futurism*³⁶. This text advocates the overcoming of a mentality rooted in a future temporality and suggests to shift the focus on that of present. The Manifesto introduces itself stating that "*the era of post-future has begun*" and through its points Berardi outlines the values that a society in the post-futurist era would take on:

1. *We want to sing of the danger of love, the daily creation of a sweet energy that is never dispersed.*

³⁶ Franco Berardi, *Manifesto of Post-Futurism*, 2009, <http://eipcp.net/n/1234779255> (accessed 8 May 2015).

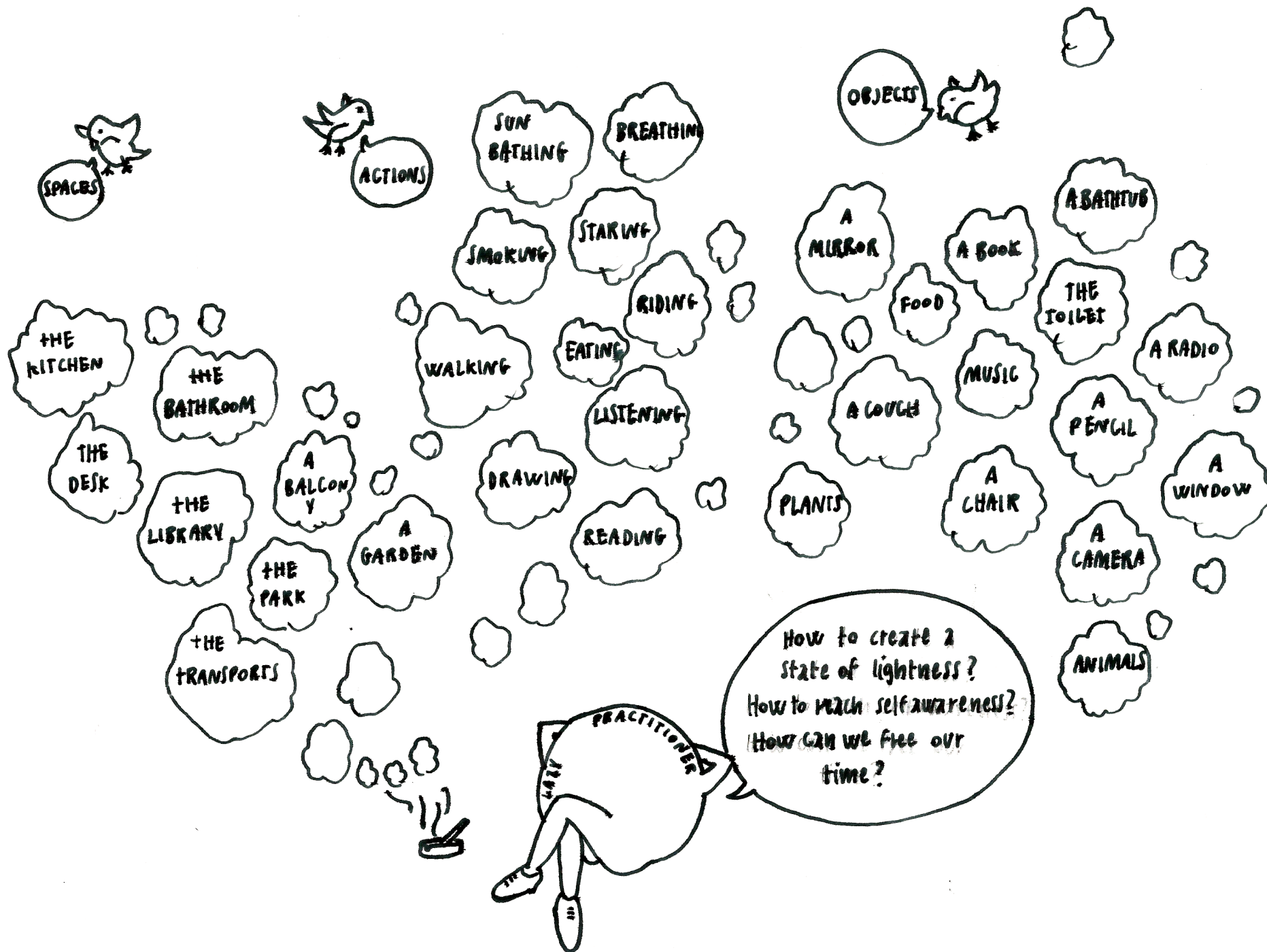
2. The essential elements of our poetry will be irony, tenderness and rebellion.

3. Ideology and advertising have exalted the permanent mobilisation of the productive and nervous energies of humankind towards profit and war. We want to exalt tenderness, sleep and ecstasy, the frugality of needs and the pleasure of the senses.

(...) 10. We demand that art turns into a life-changing force. We seek to abolish the separation between poetry and mass communication, to reclaim the power of media from the merchants and return it to the poets and the sages.

mercantile dynamics that rule our lives, and set off the re-appropriation of the reality of time.

After the hegemony of futurisation the centre of gravity moves to the present, a point of view recalls the 'humanity' of time. The restauration of present recovers the sensual experience of time as opposed to the virtuality of future. The human body re-establishes its function as measure of the world. In Bifo's words, presentness is what is sought after: the immersion in the spectrum of perceptions that comes with the reality of present. The understanding of the world through its sensual parts would originate a different ontological order from that of dematerialization that we witness today: a conceptual foundation that would generate a new engagement with our environment. Finally, condensing the role of disobedience, creativity and time in the exploration of a new outlook on existence, we could bring in the concept of laziness as a carnivalesque diversive in the approach to temporality: its unproductive practice can let us move away from the



V

In the following text, I will suggest a few exercises for the practice *active laziness*. These exercises should help you to discover this disobedient discipline, encourage you to enjoy your lazy time and become more aware of the potentialities and beneficial results of your own forms of laziness. This mini-manual wishes to help you improve the quality of your time by investigating laziness and its applications on a individual, punctual level.

Firstly, a definition of the concept of laziness: being lazy is to enjoy the time in between things, to indulge in that gap and expand it, quietly claiming back the freedom of un-categorized time. A moment of drifting for the mind and the body, an occasion for wandering without an aim, a form of awakened rest. The detachment that stems from it brings this habit close to meditation: daydreaming without a focus, self-indulgence without commitment. Exercising in laziness means to aim at state of mind-lightness, a suspension of time and awareness of the self.

Before starting with such exercises, please note that all my suggestion are based on personal experience and being instructed by a subjective interpretation they may not apply to everyone. Nonetheless, I will try to consider broader applications of this practice so that these few instructions can be useful to a larger number of readers.

~

Active laziness finds its most simple realisation in everyday activities, and a very fertile ground for it is, ironically, the work place. The space and time of work offer multiple opportunities to

the training of laziness as a *counter-activity*, consisting on the enjoyment of the suspension between other productive activities.

That of the common workspace is a particularly appropriate set for observation, one of the main tools of this practice, and at the same time one his goals: when the gaze turns into contemplation, laziness starts to be a fruitful activity, as it allows individuals to deepen the consciousness of their experience of life, even in its more common and mundane details. A few useful items to our purpose are: a pen, paper, a phone, a camera a window. The window is surely the best starting point in the practice of 'break times' as a form of postponment. As an endless source of distraction, it does not require any specific effort more than looking in order to be activated. Think of how when still at school, you would use the classroom's window as a chance of diversion, a rabbit-hole for the imagination that could convert the passivity of classes into the wonderful activity of daydreaming. The frame of the window presents countless hints to be studied: movements, noises, colours, signs, the combination of shapes from architecture and nature, atmospherical events, stories, in fact, every variation inscribed in the cut out of the window presenting an opportunity for detachment and fluctuation of the mind.

Yet if the window gives you access to the outside as a scenario for multiple distractions, the interior of the workspace can be just as potent. The combination of people and objects you are surrounded by hide an equal wealth of mind-drifts. This is why a pen or a camera can be useful, so that the sparkles of diversion can be recorded and the span of a laziness be dilatated.

Another place where the detournment of your workspace can happen is your desk: even the mere position you approach the table can completely twist its functionalities. A busy desk hosts a

greater number of distractions, while an empty one is suitable for naps.



~

In the domestic context the bathroom makes a great training field, as the activities for which this place is originally conceived make naturally room for wandering. That is why speaking of tools, the toilet is on top of the list: this piece of furniture is known for its natural predisposition to concentration and the very first function to which this object is designated marks a suspension in itself, a break in the flow of productiveness. Seizing these moments, you could make use of these physiological time-outs and expand them into longer parenthesis.

Right after the toilet follows the mirror: the tool of self-inspection *par excellence*, countless hours have been spent in front of it, eroding the strict timetable of a morning routine and washing away otherwise 'productive' afternoons. Inquisitive pores inspections,

accurate hairs searches, a deep ear cleaning or a meticulous passage of dental floss: each of us has a favourite occupation, a pointless activity which ipnotic power enchant us and dissolve any other obligation in our day. Have you ever tried to find out how many hairs you can count on your head?

~

Looking at the frame of public space the occasions for laziness grow, as the use of many of them partially comprehend to be the set of un-productiveness: streets, park, stations and any other common area that is not conceived for a commercial aim or a form of entertainment. These urban entities see either the passage of individuals from their private environment to that of work, either the stroll of people temporarily suspended from the unfolding of their day. Think for example of an employee bringing his lunch box to the park to enjoy half an hour of sun.

Among these spaces, a particularly fit one for our research is the street: the street is where an attitude of *un-productiveness* – meaning a provisional suspension of productivity – turns into *non-productiveness*, gaining a shade of rebellion and resistance. Imagine if, stroking the genius' lamp, you asked for the disappearance of all factories, all offices and the shops on the planet: where would this mass of workers, white-collars and sale assistants go? They would all pour on the pavements, in the very basic thread of the urban fabric. Lost and confused at first, at some point some of them may start to chill, hang around, group into gaggles, light a sigarette. Wait long enough and a parade, a demonstration or a gigantic pic-nic could come out of it. Maybe after a while the police would show up, alarmed by this inexplicable phenomenon of collective laxism. How long would it take to arrest everybody for vagrancy? As a quick solution to this emergency, temporary offices could be set up in prisons. Or maybe

cities would see their landscape completely transformed by the disappearance of work. Maybe.

Fantastic visions aside, the street is already the designated set for the radical opposite of work, as homelessness. That is why the enacting of active laziness finds, in my opinion, a great stage on it. The primary occupation that belongs to the street is walking, going from a start to an end following a specific direction. For what regards our exercises though, walking shifts toward wandering, the direction has gone missing and no logical path is required. A start is still present but the end has been lost: walking turns to drifting. Wandering as a meditative technique is a practice that hails from Ancient Greece, where the philosophical school of the Peripatetics was born, founded by Aristotele around 335 b.C. The name of the school has two recognized etymologies: the first comes from the word *peripatos* which indicates an area of the garden enclosed into a row of columns; the second refers to *peripathein*, a Greek verb meaning 'to walk', 'to stroll'. According to the myth, Aristotele used to converse with his disciples wandering in the Lyceum garden, making the act of walking one of the *topos* of ancient philosophy. Concerning laziness, wandering is a very useful practice, being a tool of exploration, discovery and surprise. Again, the power of observation as an instrument to re-possess our time reappears. The absence of an objective in your itinerary as well as the lack of reference points is a critical element for the effectiveness of this exercise: curiosity will be your compass and every input from the environment will find your mind open and receptive. A foreign city would be ideal for the optimal realisation of this experiment, but even an unknown neighborhood can activate this mechanism of playful disorientation. When the right conditions for a purposeless walk come up, any sort of accessory can be an appropriate equipment: cigarettes, food, music, books. Similarly to the lazy times in the workspace, the street is also an environment

particularly inclined to recording: a pen, a booknote and a camera are always handy during explorations.

Ultimately, something to always remember is that endurance has no place in this type of training: no time or space length is required, so anytime tiredness or boredom show up you should not hesitate to suspend your attempt and swap it for a beer, a phone call to your parents or a snuggle with the cat. Active laziness finds its realisation only in effortlessness: whenever the dismissing of productivity makes room for lightness, dazed awareness and freedom from the tyranny of time abduction.

Conclusion

A meeting of daydreamers, disobedients and wanderers from around the world has been held the 13th August, this year world resources' overshoot day. The gathering happened on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a nomadic island of waste that migrates around the Pacific Ocean. The assembly culminated with the foundation of the *League for Mindful Laziness and Continuous Being*, a clandestine organisation which aim is to gather a secret think tank to experiment with alternative solutions for human existence.

LML&CB's mission is stated in the group Poetical Manifesto: in a time of ideals stagnation and skepticism about the shape of the future the League intends, through these seven fronts for action, to set the germs for a search of a new social functionment based on self-accomplishment and of an harmonious balance between micro and macrocosms. Carnavalesque sabotage, cheerful strikes and free ports for imagination are some of the weapons employed by the League to break down the current structures which impede the achievement of their objectives.

The gearwheel of a past delusion is crumbling on our heads
and there is no repair but halting the mechanics of this clockwork
Sabotage! Like labourers armed with clogs
we will tear down the timepiece that locked us up
Get down from this carousel of frustrations and join our loafer
parade
stripped from fatigue, we ring the bell and call the time of
recreation
Let the carnival begin!

Ours is a battle to free men's time from the snare that smothers it
and expose the crime that is the futility of a waged life
as we know the treasure that lies in every moment
girded with rebellious idleness and visionary desertion
we will win back the meaning of present

We want to imagine wealth anew
an abundance to fill bellies, hands, hearts and minds
extinguished by hoarding, extended by spreading
a richness secret to the avaricious and made for gifting

We want to heal our minds from the venom that consumes them
infused by mercenaries on vipers' payroll
instill them with the fantasy that has been sacked
recover their firmness against the wolf's bite
cleared from the refrain that hypnotised them
our imaginary will be decolonised

We know the system overhead is mirrored in that underfoot
and that the symmetry of the extremities is a law that rules all
forms

We must live aware of this never failing order
as privilege is a fools joke
and exception a cruel illusion

Creation for delight, that is our subversion
Grave and heavy minds, mutiny!
Invade the streets, they are your playground
In arlequins reprisal against order' smouts
levity is a feared weapon

To regain existence
which fullness forms every shape
To awaken the body and discover realness again
to recall all senses in our limbs
and bring back the pleasure of being³⁷

³⁷ This text has been written as part of the project *Poetical Manifesto*, conceived for the exhibition *Where is the Gold?* which took place in the Royal College of Art during September 2015.

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