

# The warrior the merchant the sage\*

Franco Berardi

On 15 February 2003 when millions of people all over the world took to the streets to stop the war, many felt that military global power was about to lose all consensus and that this could signal the beginning of its crisis. But power is no longer grounded on consensus, but terror, ignorance and technological-economic financial and psychic automatisms, that politics is no longer able to control and that mass action is no longer able to modify or stop.

In the following days we learned that a peace movement of gigantic proportions is not sufficient to stop the war and that democracy does not possess instruments capable of defusing military automatisms that terrorism and security paranoia have set into motion. Even if the majority of public opinion opposes war, the dynamic that leads to war is not stopped. Terror is the political investment on which the Bush administration placed all of its bets. There is no need to create consensus through discursive, propagandistic and ideological instruments, it is sufficient to use psychic automatisms founded on terror. Terror is born before the terrorist attacks, terror is born out of the cruel and continuous competitiveness that the principle *mors tua vita mea* has inculcated into the mind of every individual. The history of the 20th century is the history of the conflict and alliances of three figures. The sage is the heir of human labour, the bearer of the intelligence accumulated by the infinite succession of acts of labour and the infinite series of acts of refusal of labour. The refusal of labour induces the evolutive motion of intelligence. Intelligence is refusal of work realised into socially useful form. Because of intelligence it becomes possible to substitute human labour with machines. Because of refusal of work, science is pushed forward, developed, put into practice. Since the outset, modern science has been aware of its function in this respect. Knowledge multiplies the human capacity to produce useful things and the spaces of freedom for all human beings, by reducing the necessary labour time to produce what society needs. This means that to know is power. The merchant and the warrior want to turn knowledge into an instrument of power. And to this end they have to subdue the sage. But this does not occur easily, because knowledge does not tolerate domination. Thus, the warrior and the merchant resort to traps and deceit, to submit the power of thinking to the power of money and violence.

In a 1958 book entitled 'The training witches', Robert Jungk tells of how in the Second World War the warrior captured the sage, through the history of the Manhattan project that led to the realisation of the nuclear bomb. A group of scientists was faced with blackmail: Hitler might be preparing a nuclear bomb. We need to hurry, to anticipate him.

According to Jungk, 'In the Summer of 1939 twelve men, the physicists who were working on the Manhattan project, could have agreed to stop the construction of atomic bombs. But they missed their opportunity and were unable to decisively make their thoughts and actions adequate to the future consequences of scientific discoveries; neither did they have, in such critical situation, enough faith in the traditions of their profession. At the end of the war, von Weiszacker commented, 'the fact that we were a family was not sufficient, maybe we should have been an internationally body with disciplinary powers on its members. But is such thing possible in modern science?' (R. Jungk: *Gli apprendisti stregoni*, Einaudi, Torino, 1958, pag. 92).

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\* "The warrior the merchant the sage", by Franco Berardi, is part of the translation of the book: "Il sapiente il mercante il guerriero" which has been published in Rome by Derive Approdi, 2004. The book will be published in Spain (October 2004) and in the United Kingdom (2005).

In Weiszacker's words we find the problem that we encountered again in its full expression half a century later: which organisational form and what rules can those who produce knowledge give themselves, if we want to stop political, economic and military power from using knowledge for purposes that are extraneous to knowledge itself, and above all, contrary to the common interest of humanity? In that occasion, the US government managed to convince a group of scientists to surrender to its blackmail. The effect of the sage's surrender to the warrior was Hiroshima.

At that moment the struggle for the liberation of the sage from the warrior began, and it culminated in '68. 1968 represented first of all the sage's refusal to lend her/his knowledge to the warrior and the decision to place the sage at the service of society. Then the merchant came along to seduce the sage and subdue her/his knowledge to the domination of technical-economic automatisms. The evaluation of the truth of knowledge is submitted to the criteria of competitiveness, economic efficiency and the pursuing of maximum profit.

In the two decades inaugurated by Thatcher-Reagan, knowledge has been put to work in conditions of absolute dependence on capital. Science has been incorporated into the automatisms of technology, deprived of the possibility of changing the finalities that guide its functional operation. The intensive application of knowledge to production is concretised in the creation of the digital techno-sphere, which emanates effects of extraordinary power. But this power is submitted to the technical automatisms where power is articulated. Constrained within the categories of the profit economy, technology increases the productivity of labour whilst simultaneously multiplying misery, subordination of human beings to wage labour, solitude, unhappiness and psychopathy.

I remember when I was a child in the '50s like everyone else I was fascinated by the idea that we would have lived the year 2000. Newspapers used to write that in the year 2000 all the problems of humanity would have been solved because technology would have assured peace, freedom and abundance. Now that the year 2000 has come, however, instead of peace war hangs over the world as never before, atomic bombs proliferate in the hands of fanatics of all religions. Instead of freedom there is the unquestionable domination of economic priorities, instead of abundance there is slavery, misery and hunger in two thirds of the world. The fanatic application of market rules has produced this folly and we are racing towards catastrophe.

Any project of reform or change makes no sense unless we are prepared to radically redefine the direction of this race, and either the warrior or the merchant cannot decide the direction of the race. Only the sage can establish it. Only human knowledge, following its own rules, its priorities and lines of possibility has the right to redefine the rules of production and exchange. Only women and men as subjects of knowledge can decide the direction the world is to move towards.

This is the great novelty affirmed in Seattle: the merchants have no right to decide on the lives of million of people on the basis of their own economic profit. Only a movement of researchers, a high-tech labour movement of the cognitariat that is autonomously organised can stop the dictatorship of financial corporations. The global movement that exploded in Seattle in 1999 pointed towards a direction: globalisation must be guided by ethically motivated knowledge and become a power in the hands of all women and men, not the power of a minority.

>From Seattle onwards a movement emerged that aims at the social, epistemic and technological re-composition of cognitive labour. This requires that scientific research is autonomous from the merchants' interests. This awareness has grown ever since: millions of people in the world have started to reclaim the autonomy of their brain from profit. In information technology we have witnessed the diffusion of practices of open source spread; in biotechnological and pharmacological

sectors there has been a struggle to claim free access to the products of intellectual innovation; in the cycle of information media activism has spread.

Capital reacted, following the dictates of liberalist ideology, with the coercive privatisation of the products of collective knowledge and the submission of experimentation to economic competition. The privatisation of collective knowledge has encountered resistance and opposition everywhere, and cognitive labourers have started to realise that their potential is superior to the power of the merchant. Since intellectual labour is at the centre of the productive scene, the merchant no longer possesses the juridical or material instruments to impose the principle of private property. Given that the most precious goods in social production have an immaterial and reproducible character, we have discovered that the private appropriation of goods makes no sense, whilst the reasons sustaining the privatisation of material goods in industrial society have weakened. In the sphere of semiotic-capital and cognitive labour, when a product is consumed, instead of disappearing it remains available, whilst its value increases the more its use is shared. This is how the network economy works, and this contradicts the very principle of private property on which up to now capitalism was founded.

Since this perspective has started to spread, the warrior has come back on the scene, with the old economy of petrol magnates and arms producers. The amount of sadness, fear and anxiety accumulated in the folds of social labour during the nineties has now been turned into fanaticism, aggressiveness and obsession with identity. The merchant has resorted to the warrior to submit the sage again. Bill Gates allied himself with George Bush. The merchant who robbed collective intelligence allied himself with the idiot warrior and together they try to suffocate any inch of wisdom, to subsume once and for all knowledge to profit and power.

Thanks to the opening of the stock market to the masses carried out in the 90's, a mass participation to the profit of capital was possible and this resulted in the dotcom economy. This also opened the possibility for a vast process of self-organisation of cognitive labourers. Cognitive labourers invested their competence, knowledge and creativity and found the means to create an enterprise in the stock market. For several years the form of enterprise was the point of encounter for financial capital and cognitive labour at a high productivity rate. A new form of self-enterprise glorified at once the autonomy of labour and the dependency on the market.

After a decade of uninterrupted growth and social alliance between cognitive labour and recombining capital, this alliance was broken. The fall of the stock market that began in April 2000 was the beginning of a political crisis of the relation of capital and cognitive labour. Many different factors provoked this rupture. First of all, the collapse of the psychic and social energies of cognitive labour: overexploitation, the acceleration of life rhythms, the 24h long working day of mobile phone workers, depression, the excessive use of stimulant drugs to sustain the pace of hyper-labour have lead the cognitive labourer into a depressive phase. The collapse came from inside. At the same time, the monopolistic attack against the army of dotcom, the front of cognitive labourers and the free market occurred. The imposition of limits on experimentation, the imposition of monopolistic standards, the alliance between monopolies and political power have taken the breath away from the diffuse economy. Then the monopolistic counterrevolution began and the conditions for a shift from the network economy to the war economy were created.

The new economy had witnessed the flourishing of a process of self-organisation of cognitive labour in the form of the enterprise, but in the same years a predatory lumpen-bourgeoisie emerged to take advantage of the crisis of traditional capitalist rules in order to appropriate for itself enormous shares of the social capital, as all the post-Enron collapse cases demonstrated. Neo-liberalism in the long run has not favoured free market but monopoly.

At this stage, almost miraculously, whilst the crisis precipitated and was taking away all credibility and power of the groups linked to the Bush administration, those airplanes fell from the sky and gave birth to an era of unlimited violence, an era when power, lost all legitimacy, legitimates itself through war. But in war, perspectives are redefined. Nazi-liberal aggressive capitalism evoked the spectre of the war to defend its vacillating power, but in the course of this war, which is unacceptable for the conscience and life style of the great majority of the western population, anything could happen.

Above all, what could happen is that cognitive labour starts giving an organised and self-conscious form to its internal break. The problem Weiszacker talks about is urgent today: is it possible to have a self-organisation of scientists that is founded on the autonomy of science from power? This is no longer a concern for a small group of nuclear physicists, but for millions and millions of workers in science and technology, in administration, in education and therapy.

The pacific army of the cognitariat holds the key to deconstruct the chain of automatisms in which capitalism fortified itself.