

A 2020 THAT WE COULD ATTAIN

By Frithjof Bergmann

On the first page of the brochure of the first Center for New Work, that is now 25 years old, there was printed a single sentence. It read:

THE NEW TECHNOLOGY COMES TOWARDS US LIKE A LARGE WAVE. IF WE DO NOTHING IT COULD DROWN US, BUT IF WE MOVE WITH INTELLIGENCE AND SKILL, THE WAVE COULD LIFT US HIGHER THAN WE EVER WERE BEFORE.

Clearly our very first act was the declaration of an EITHER/OR.

The great wave has by now been crashing down on us for what seems like an interminable time and there are hills of flotsam that have accumulated around us on the beach. The mass arrival of new forms of automation has washed away great, hulking slabs of jobs, like sand-pies made by children. But the new technologies also brought globalization in their train, and the complex effects of this phenomenon have only just begun: one signal of the next phase of its development is that China has begun to import into Europe, and also the United States, elegant looking high quality cars, that are like so much else that comes from China a great deal cheaper than the cars produced by us. But in addition to automation and globalization, a third giant calamity has spread havoc and misery. That is the flight of the farmers from the land into the slums that at this point surround most cities, especially those in the second world.

If one is prepared to see the grim side of what might be in store for us, then a specter hovering near us is the possibility of a pandemic, worse still than that of AIDs. Another is the chance of a nuclear conflagration, let loose by one of the rogue splinter groups that are now in possession of the needed knowledge. Beyond that there still hums in the background the apprehension of the coming of an economic crash, maybe through the excesses of the U.S. deficit, or through the too galloping growth of China.

With all that there are still the, at the present moment, two most loudly clamoring dangers: there is the ever deepening and ever widening split between the two remaining worlds, our world, that of the shrinking opulent oasis, and the wholly other world, that of the deepening morass of poverty and mayhem, what I will call the desert. And there is the heating of the earth. Both of these last have changed greatly in the last few years.

The rift between the two worlds is now no longer just a scandal. No one can doubt that there are multiple, sometimes subtle, connections between the despair of the second world and the spread of terrorism. That cleavage has, therefore, now become a mortal danger. And similar with what we used to call the problems of the environment. Formerly they signified the dying out of an endangered species, or the loss of wetlands or of trees. Here, too, the magnitude has grown immensely: we are now turning up a flame that heats up the very ground on which we walk.

It is not hard to conjure up a picture of what Europe might be like in 2020 if these trends continue: For one, Europe might be considerably smaller. Many of the coastal regions, with Holland, the Netherlands, and Northern Germany perhaps in the lead could by the then have sunken under water. At the same time the quality of daily life in maybe eight or ten European cities might be like life is in Jerusalem right now. Among them might well be London or Madrid, but also Hamburg, and perhaps Graz. This could be one of the consequences of the exacerbated gap between those who by then will be living in still more opulent oasis, and the preponderant majority of those living in the desert. Waving good bye to one's children that leave for school might be different then from how it is now. The parents might not be there when the children return, and just as possibly you might wait for them in vain.

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The conjunction of all three of these monster occurrences has put the job-system in the United States and in Europe under unheard of and still steadily increasing pressures. The history of work in the last twenty years has been a sequence of retreats.

The three phenomena produced a power shift, and that shift led to a domino row of ultimatums. Over and over again non-negotiable terms were put on the table. You either meet the conditions that have just been announced, or else the jobs, that are in our world the omni-value, the currency on which all else depends, will disappear.

The row of ultimatums translated into an equally long line of amputations. There was no extremity, no protuberance, no member of the body of work that has not been trimmed or cut. Whether it was benefits, or time off, or protection in case of accidents, or of course pay itself. One of the many ways in which we deceive ourselves about the true extent of the pruning that has been performed is that we forget that all this has not just happened to those close to the ground, but that this has been done also to the work of physicians, and social workers and professors. The process during the last decades has been relentless. One first cut off pieces of the fingers, and then of the toes, and then progressively ever more slices of the arms and legs, till only the torso of what work once was remains.

We could also say: "Work has been decimated." That would compress for us into a single word a massive change that has occurred.

At the same time – and this is not a paradox - almost nothing is left of life except for work. The rest was emptied and work like water under pressure flowed in and filled the space.

If one devotes time to it and has many conversations with a colorful variety of people then, eventually a striking similarity becomes apparent: Many people in our current culture experience work like a mild disease. Not like cancer or diabetes. No, like a cold. When one has a cold it is natural to say: in two days it will be over. In the case of work one says: It is already Wednesday – I can hold out till Friday. That is the point: one waits for work to end. Waiting for the weekend is still minor, the waiting in the case of many is more grave: they wait for the next vacation, or much longer for their retirement

If you travel in the German speaking parts of Europe and ask about the economy, the answer will be that for the most part the

economies are in splendid shape. Their performance breaks yet another record nearly every week. Indeed, not long ago an article in one of the leading economic journals argued that there is a theoretical upper limit, and that the economies of central Europe are pushing up against it, and that it is a theoretical impossibility for them to still be better than they are.

If you travel in the same countries and ask not about the economies but instead about the people, then the answer will be very different. Many people feel exhausted, are in anguish and look into the future with dismay. Many feel discouraged, cynical and sad. A great number are obsessed with how their lives deteriorate and run downhill. Their work is longer and harder than it was, but their pay is less. All around them, they witness a shortening and a decline. And so it is also with their health benefits, and their rents, and with the little they have saved. The occasions where someone suddenly bursts into intense rage are anything but rare.

There is one expression that I heard many times in the American computer industry, maybe especially during my time with Microsoft. Someone says: "I don't have a life" – not just I am feeling low, but I no longer feel – that, and all else seems to have stopped.

One egregious mistake is to imagine that work is simply shrinking, that the trouble is no more than this: the frightful illusion that it is only becoming smaller, that there is merely less of it. That stands behind the idea that "economic growth" can cure this, can return us back to health.

In our frenzy to produce "economic growth" we sacrifice everything. We offer tax abatement, subventions, bribes. But we also close libraries, museums, disband orchestras, close Kindergartens and swimming pools. Even theaters and universities and schools are constantly reined in. In other words, we burn our furniture, old family photos, picture frames. We throw all of that into the fire to keep the steam in the economic kettle hot. That is what we do: we burn our violins.

Our first drum-roll sentence, of course, turned right around on the proverbial dime. Yes, we might be drowned, but the other side

that we envisioned even then, in '82, was the possibility of an ASCENT! The first Center for New Work did not propose merely an amelioration, or a softening of coming blows. Even less the retardation of approaching calamities. No, the same technologies that could throw us down into a world of many Jerusalems and unheard of floods – the same technologies used with “imagination and intelligence” could raise us “higher than we ever were before.” That means higher than the Renaissance, perhaps even higher than the Greeks, and possibly even up to the long-postponed fulfillment of some dreams.

Given the unbelievable magnitude of the three causes that have driven us down this path, what conceivably could be a counterforce that might reverse the over-all direction, so that instead of careening down we would be starting an Ascent?

One thing is certain: nothing small or mild comes even into question. That is a matter of mere size. A little increase in taxes over here, or some appetizing bit incentives over there, or anything else that in the end is only yet another turn of a small wheel, simply could not produce effects that would be large enough.

THE ORIGIN IN FLINT

In truth there existed only one kind of work in Flint, for the entire city had been built in the middle of vast corn-fields by General Motors Corporation specifically so that in that city they could make their cars. From 1980 on, rumors had circulated that thousands upon thousands would be laid off. It was like when a horse in jumping breaks its back, and the horse trembles for some seconds before it collapses on the ground. That is how Flint trembled after those news had traveled from bar to bar. And soon enough there were computers on both sides of the assembly lines, in the same places in which weeks before there still had been women and men.

It was in that city and at around that time that we established the first Center for New Work. Into this then prevailing mood we tossed the idea that the layoffs did not absolutely have to happen, that there was an alternative. Quite on purpose, we announced this with a blithe naivete', very like in one of the

stories of Hans Christian Anderson. Some of this was acted. In reality we had prepared this move for years. The fact was that I had written the book, *On Being Free*, as long ago as '78, and in the last chapter of that book, the strategy that we now proposed was already previewed in detail. Nonetheless, we aimed at the impression that we had just stumbled in from a muddy field and that we were talking with the innocence of a by-standing child.

With the same kind of forethought, we again formulated our alternative in the very simplest finger-painted terms, and stayed far away from the usual inscrutable lawyer language. We said bluntly that about fifty percent of all the then employed workers would be laid off. At the time that seemed outrageous, though by now it, of course, has been surpassed. It was an estimate that turned out to be too low. Still, that figure landed like a bucket of cold water on someone sleeping in a bed. We explained further that the now beginning automation would result in a divided city. "Half of you will be working overtime till your knuckles bleed, and the other half will be sitting on the sidewalks, unemployed. What we propose is a different division: one that does not cut vertically, from the top down, but one that cuts horizontally, from side to side; one that will make two equal evenly stacked layers. We are not proposing 35 or 28.8 or some such number of reduced working hours. We say: if half of the jobs are going, then cut the work in half as well. And that means: six months in the factories, and the other six months out."

Right at this point was the cardinally all-important turn. For we insisted that six months out would not be a waiting. "Those six months you will not be twiddling your thumbs in a 'job-bank' or do park-walk cleaning, or some other fraudulent fake labor. The offer of the just opened Center for New Work is that we – the staff of that center – will in the other six months do everything imaginable to help you discover what your talents are, what skills you possess, but also what are your ideas, your values, your best and serious thinking. We will talk with you about what it is that makes you angry, but above all, and most intensely we will bear down full bore on what it is that you want!

In that sentence we sometimes stressed the "you" and sometimes the "want." We did this because in literally hundreds of different conversations the woman or man we were talking to

explained that in their whole life up to now they had always been confronted with a demand, or a requirement, or an expectation, with something they had to do to be a “good girl” or a “good man,” or to be liked by the teacher, to graduate from high-school, to get a good job, to land in a good marriage, right up to having enough money for retirement. Any number of the people with whom we talked in this way at some point exploded into a loud cry. “Nobody has ever asked me that before. Not in seriousness. Not with patience. Not with calm and time and insistence. No one has ever asked what I wanted, and whether it was really me who wanted it, and not my father, or my teacher, or my priest.” Often a burly bear of a man, with tattoos covering half his body, would break down and cry in sobbing, wailing tears because there never had been time, there had never been an opportunity to stop, to put everything else aside, and ask hard and stubbornly what he himself actually wanted!

The repetition of this led us to talk of a “reversal.” What was needed was a complete turnaround. A going back to a first starting point. Don’t ask: what does everybody want from me, what will be accepted, or what will sell. What will make me liked, and successful and promoted? Ask instead: what at bottom and in seriousness and in the solitude of my own life do I really want? That is how the one phrase that attached itself to New Work more than any other, came to be. To find out what people, “really, really wanted,” with the much quoted double “really” grew directly out of the idea of this “reversal.”

In a dry matter-of-fact tone, we’d often add: The discovery of what you seriously want to do, will be only the first part. In the six months that you will be out of the factories, we will work with you on a training, totally different from any training you ever had before. There will not be one hour of dust-settling boredom. You will be panting, and sweating to keep up. But you and we will spend every ounce of energy we have, so that when the six months are over you can go back to work on a more highly skilled, more advanced level than before – and not by any means just that: No! Back into work that fits you, that matters to you, that is for the first time closer to work that you really chose to do.

We went on and said often with our voices somewhat raised: “Pay no heed whatsoever to the frogs who quack about our

'running out of work' and talk as if work was a river that is drying up. Work is totally and wholly different from that. It is infinite, it has no limits, it is everywhere. Every bench that you see can be improved, every rock can be turned into a sculpture, every human being needs help to climb up the Ascent. There is not one thing in this world that is not an invitation to give it work.

We are proposing six months in the factory. But in the other six you will be doing work that matters, that you want, that gives you a chance to make a contribution. Most of that will be New Work, work that we together can create, because work is infinite."

We talked in Union Halls, in Clubs, in Coney Islands, in Churches, and of course in the streets, and in the early days there were many who shook their heads. We got so used to seeing the shaking of the heads, that we developed a little trick and outright encouraged it. We said: "Do by all means shake your heads. We are used to it and it is good for your circulation." Of course, we also asked what the shaking was about and many told us in no uncertain terms. "You guys have been stuck in your university far too long. But you do have a sense of humor, for to imagine that after twenty years on the line, tightening the same three nuts every forty seconds one day like the next, that after twenty years of that anybody still knows what he "really, really wants " – that is a joke! A big bad belly-laugh!"

That slap we had not just expected, for it we had waited like hunters do in blinds. We were prepared and ready, and every time that ball was thrown we swung and tried to hit it out, across the fence. The retort was quick: "For someone not to know what she really wants does not take twenty years on the line. There are vast numbers of people who do not know what they in earnest want. It does not matter what work they do. It can be men or women, and very in particular kids who just graduate from school. It is very much the other way around. Not to know this is not an affliction, that has a cause like you get black lung from working in coal mines. On the contrary, it is widely spread.

Very many people have a very tenuous relationship to their desires. What they want remains bland and vague. There is nothing sharp and crystallized to which they can point and say, yes this, precisely is something that I with passion and

determination want. This is so generally true that we coined a short-hand name for it. We began to say that many suffer from the "Poverty of Desire."

Part of this condition is a loose and very breakable connection I observed that thousands of times in my students. One would come into my office and describe an idea that she had for her dissertation. I would listen, and say after a while - to my mind quite neutrally - oh, really? That often was enough to cut the chord. I imagined that I was well-meaning, but she would raise her hands and mutter: "You don't like it. Right, I will come back next week with a different topic."

This thought, cuts deeper than one might at first suppose, for it flatly contradicts the absurd idea of human nature that the 18th century implanted so deep into our minds that it is still one of the strings that makes us dance like puppets. The foolishness to which I am referring is the monomaniac idea that everyone invariably acts to his own optimal advantage – i.e. the dogma of egoism. The image of human nature which that axiom evokes is that one needs to be careful on a bus, because one's neighbor might flex back his lips and bite off one's right hand. The truth is miles from this. Great flocks of people are shy, and fragile, and above all easily discouraged. One breeze of ill wind is enough to make them fold their wings.

We followed through on the replies we made, and insisted that this Poverty of Desire is not a fated disability, but that it can be worked on and improved. Indeed, there was something incredible about this matter. What could possibly be more basic, more necessary and more urgent than knowing what one wanted? Was the ignorance of this not the most disastrous disadvantage that one could imagine? What hope was there of reaching anything that would be pleasure, or happiness, or satisfaction if one did not even know one's own deep desires?

What is more, if the Poverty of Desire was indeed a widespread malaise, and that was surely obvious, then it was deeply strange that it had not long ago become a major, much discussed concern. What could have possessed the star-studded array of great philosophers that made up the Enlightenment to not have clamored in their imposing books that this was a defect

that it was urgent to address? The prize question of that entire age was what a rational society should be like, and hence there should have been all manner of proposals of what socially and individually, in pedagogy and in institutions, could be done so that this frailty, this lack of spine, this absence that is so connected with the insipid and the lukewarm could be cured.

In these and many other ways, we explained that something like our Center was frightfully overdue; that speed and reaching out and marshalling a campaign was urgent. In this context we reiterated many times, that we were only starting, that eventually much else would have to be done to assuage this disabling affliction.

In this way we turned this first objection, that people often do not know what they really want, into one of our cardinal, shouted-from-the-rooftops, wake-up calls. Yes, we underscored, they do not know, and this is blazingly, fireworks-like true. But exactly this is the reason for setting up our Center. Precisely, because that is for very many a daunting difficulty, enough so that they capitulate and do not even ask, and then drift through their life like intimidated sheep – that is what the rooms in our building will be for – to give people training and support and to coach them in this so far not often mentioned capability.

During those critical, crisis-ridden months, many other visitors arrived in Flint, for Flint is a symbolically important town. The UAW, the paragon of all American Unions was born there, and ever since then, all the major labor issues have been fleshed out raw and bloody first in the GM plants of Flint, before they were passed on in diluted, milder versions to the remaining centers of industry. So, Flint is very much a stage. Not surprisingly Saul Alinsky, famed for his community organizing in Chicago, came and offered suggestions along lines that he had developed there. That every faction of many different unions sent their delegates goes without saying. Ralph Nader, later presidential candidate for the Green Party, came and gave talks on the car industry and the environment. Also, the then still unknown Michael Moore, shot footage in the midst of this for his virgin film. And, of course, the entire spectrum of the Left was represented in every imaginable shade of red, from the barely detectable nuanced pink right across to the fire-engine red of the brash Maoists. It was like a

talent show. If you were inclined that way, you could listen to a presentation of a different strategy every evening of the week.

The presence of all these other individuals and groups – and there certainly also was a gaggle of the more usual politicians – was important for us, not primarily because we were boosted by the fact that we received more TV coverage than they, or because there were more articles in the papers about our proposal than about the others, or because our meetings were standing-room only when theirs sometimes needed to be cancelled from lack of attendance. All that was nice, but it was marginal and did not really count.

For us, most important was the personal, individual reaction of the workers in Flint. I had observed a great many meetings, and was witness to a lot of individual encounters. One somewhat humorous example involved a bushy-haired young Marxist, who wanted to convince one of the union members that he was the victim of oppressive exploitation. What I remember is that without a word he was taken by the arm and gently the worker lead him to his garage, showed him first his pick-up truck, then his boat, and then his two snow-mobiles – and then just nodded, by way of saying “class dismissed.”

We placed such great weight on their reactions because they struggled in such a deep morass of sheer weariness, of disappointment, of disgust with lies, and puddles of cynicism. The question was: where, if anywhere, could one find some rocks? It felt very like the unheard of question we were asking did connect. There were those who broke down and cried, but there were others who said: “Yes! I do have talents, and I do have skills, and God, I have been shooting the same four rivets into the same muffler belt for the last twenty years. No wonder General Motors is going down the drain. Yes, for somebody to find out what we can do, that would make a difference, that would help!”

It was the quality of that reaction that determined us to go on. This sounded very different from programmed babble. To not be just a tool, but to put their shoulders to it, and to climb, not for a bit more money or for this or that trivial advantage, but to get up to where one could do serious and real work, work that one had in earnest chosen – that was a bottom, that was something

that they wanted. That was not one more slogan that they waved at the end of a stick. In that it was very different from other causes in which they had been enlisted. It was they alone, in their individual person that was at stake: was this particular task one that they wanted to pursue or not? That gave them a small first installment of the respect and of the dignity that they were famished to obtain, because it so far had been given to them, always and forever in fraudulent tinsel paper wraps.

That this mattered so much had to do with my long-time obsession with the effect of ideas. Political ideas always held out promises, gorgeous rewards, wonderful possibilities but for the mass of women and of men they mostly meant only that they would one more time become the foot-soldiers in an army fighting for a cause. Foot-soldiers actually is too bland a word. They once again became cannon fodder – and here it helps to know the origin of that expression. It was a tactic in the Napoleonic wars to have waves and waves of foot-soldiers march against a dug-in row of artillery, knowing that they would be killed. One sent in rows and rows till the cannons grew too hot to be loaded yet again. Then with the path so paved the cavalry would ride across the bodies and “take out” the cannons on the hill.

Pictures that go with that word were in my mind, and I was resolved that whatever I would do, whether it would fail abysmally or be some small success, it would not become yet another drum that would recruit people into an army. I would put every obstacle that my mind was able to concoct into the way of that.

With occasional remarks we built on this. What we were doing was a first, and with a teaspoon of salt and black humor we would say: Flint is in advance of the rest of the country. (That, incidentally, turned out to be true. Soon there were boarded-up storefronts in a host of towns.) What we are doing is the laying of a new and very different foundation. It will take years till on these slabs floor by floor the house of the next, new and very different culture will have been built. It will take a different way of working, a different economy, different schools and different politics.

One of the many things I learned, one of my surprises, was

noticing that slow-walking, heavy-shouldered car-workers would chuckle to themselves with pride when they repeated: “Yeah, the next culture will be rising up in the cornfields of the Middle West.”

MANY PEOPLE – MANY PLACES

Since we certainly had caused a stir, and for a stretch were clearly the conversation in the town, similar efforts were soon initiated also by both Ford and Chrysler, but before long a great many invitations also came from far away. Since I had taught at Stanford and at Berkeley, and from that time had multiple connections to the enterprises that had sprung up in the backyard of these universities, seminars and workshops on what we were doing followed soon also in the now legendary Silicon Valley. There was no direct connection but the discussion spread into many nooks and crannies, and if one looks closely one can detect resemblances between what we had begun in Flint and the cultures that both Apple and Google developed later.

A few years later, we also initiated efforts in Europe, and in the corporate world we worked there for stretches with the Hypo-bank and much more recently with Siemens, both in Munich. It would be hard to think of a manager who did not with alacrity want what we seemingly had to offer. To have people in the offices or plants who really and in earnest wanted to perform their work – which manager does not dream of that? Her task would turn into a spirited gypsy dance. All the parts of managing that give to much of it the feel of walking uphill through backwards sliding sand, would suddenly be gone. So of course one wanted us to come, and many projects that revolved around people doing work that mattered to them, that they really chose to do were initiated, and the eagerness and the enthusiasm usually lasted and were genuine, and here and there beneficent and useful results were achieved.

Still in the early years, i.e. in the middle eighties, we undertook a sharp turn and deliberately initiated projects that were in every respect different and far from the corporate world. The extreme breadth of what we were doing became one of the hallmarks of New Work. We went so far that this raised some eyebrows and also caused some smiles, but our most important reason for seeking out such a wide spectrum of varied-colored

groups and settings had much in common with the basics of science. We did it like one experiments in a laboratory. From Flint we had learned that car-workers did respond strongly to the proposal of helping them to climb up to work that mattered to them, that returned to them dignity and respect. We had learned that this offer contained incomparably more force than a whole spate of others. That was fine, but that was ultimately just one group.

We were resolved to discover whether the same kind of offer would cause the same kind of mighty stir, for instance in homeless people, but also with at risk youth, and with middle class people in their mid-life crisis. In Detroit, we worked a stretch of five years with a group of black churches. In New York, we worked with homeless and street people in association with a famous institution, the Manhattan Bowery Corporation, that was known beyond the city, indeed nationwide. But we also worked with physicians who no longer respected the medicine they practiced, and indeed also and with great pleasure with groups of people who were all at least 75 years old. Among our more exotic efforts were a long sequence of projects with Native Indian Tribes, and several projects in different kinds of prisons. In between we of course stayed much closer to the bread and butter everyday, and had consultancies with businesses of many different sizes.

Our central effort in all of these different groups was to give them the opportunity to do work that counted, that made a difference, that gave them a chance to make a contribution. Homeless people ended up building houses in which they themselves later lived; one of the at risk youth groups built a roof-garden and in the process made an invention – the by now well-known “Vertical Gardens”- which have helped people to grow their own food in numerous cities and difficult climates; the all-male inmates of one maximum security prison put together motorcycles out of kits; some of the physicians who were sick of upper middle class patients who were not suffering from anything, healed people in slums and refugee camps. From the Native Indian tribes, I learned something that became important for me in a number of other cultures, especially in India. Asking oneself repeatedly what really mattered to oneself seemed to them an “inward journey,” and that helped to quickly form a strong chord between them and the Ascent that I was trying to

explain.

Gradually we learnt that work chosen with conviction has three main attributes: 1. It gives strength, it makes vigorous. It has the exactly opposite effect from work that one experiences as a mild disease, which weakens, debilitates and drains. 2. Many who are forced to perform decimated work because nothing else is available to them, feel that they have no life; that they are going through the motions but do not in any true sense live. A fact that many discover to their deep surprise, is that the much advertised, fatuous strategies to “really live” – from taking vacations without end, to venturing into sexual escapades at an inappropriately late age – are painful failures, while finally doing work that changes something in the world, turns out to be the great rainbow bride from a shadowy existence over to real life. 3. Possibly more decisive than all else, work done in earnest, done because it counts gives meaning to one’s life. Of all the curses that the usual job-work spits into people’s faces the most damaging and dreadful is the curse that their work is meaningless. This re-enforces a theme which I have traced throughout: Work has been spoiled, ruined, made miserable not only for those whom I call the desert people. No, many of the top managers I have known writhed in their corner offices from the pains inflicted by that curse, and it is the lack of meaning that drives many who made it to the top of the ladder to then leave that life.

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In the last few years, roughly since 2000, the units became larger. Invitations came from universities, cities, towns, as well as regions, but also in particular from governments of foreign countries. The situation in most of these has similarities. Usually some members of the government, two or three who sit in the cabinet, are appalled by the rise in poverty and unemployment, the rise in crime and violence and murder. In nearly every case these politically-positioned people have come to the conclusion that the strategy of economic stimulation does not work, or more precisely that it is greatly insufficient. The number of people living in poverty in many countries is distinctly a majority, and a

great number of statistics (that are of course unreliable) estimate the figure at 70%. Members in many of these governments have reached the conclusion that it is utterly unrealistic to imagine that people in those numbers could ever find even low-paying, marginal jobs. Gradually, the climate of opinion is shifting towards the idea that there must be some other dramatically different solution.

That is the context in which the invitations to other countries are frequently extended. The interest, however, is not only in the self-making aspect of the Ascent, though that is of course immediately useful. Our determination to discover what people really want, stands also in sharp contrast to many projects that are conceived and planned down to the last dotted "I" in Tuebingen, or another university. The world sometimes does seem like a cemetery of failed projects, and perhaps that would be less the case if the effort to ask people about their desires were more sustained.

TOWARDS A SELF-MAKING ECONOMY

An unfortunately awesome number of people waste away long stretches of their lives doing something that they experience as a mild disease. Possibly they were naturally timid, but there probably was also pressure. In any case they helped to prepare Income Taxes for thirty years. Then, maybe suddenly something extraordinary happened. They ripped through strings and ropes and twine and embarked on what all along they knew to be their true vocation. They became musicians. For us, it is crucially important that not just one but two things happened. They suddenly almost burst with vigor. Their walk, the manner in which they carry their bodies changed noticeably. They poured some of their excess enthusiasm into their relationships, so that those improved as well. That is the one side. The other side is that they also ended up making much more money than they brought home when they were shuffling forms.

In some, there is still deeply rooted conviction that "real" work must be hard and heavy, and they are therefore reflexively predisposed that "doing what one really wants to do," must be disreputable fluff. That is one of the countless remnants of what in history is called the Protestant Work Ethic. Since these roots

indeed go far down, one should probably remind oneself once a week, and one's children maybe once a day that this is false. People with the mentality of Scrooge in Dickens Christmas story find that irritating and obnoxious, but there nonetheless are swarms of people who in the first place really want to do something that has meaning, and who, in the second place, are incomparably better paid when they do that: they end up happier and richer at one and the same time.

There is much more to be said on the relationship that really chosen work has to finances and the economic. That people in general work with much more motivation and energy, and are therefore more productive, not to speak of punctual when they do their chosen work, is so self-evidently true, that one almost has to apologize for mentioning it at all. And there certainly is also a broad and swiftly moving trend that runs in the direction of matching people with work that pleases them and in which they flourish. It would be child's play to enumerate corporations, or small businesses, or for that matter conductors or directors of films who are success stories because they practice that idea.

Though this is true and important and by no means marginal, it ultimately, is of course, as we all know an extremely corseted narrow point. Even with brilliantly better schools, and counseling vastly superior to the jobcounseling that we have now an enormous number, a sea of human beings will end up in jobs that cripple them. Besides – no, not besides, but centrally – that does not begin to solve the swarm of problems from which we started. It is very clear that teaching people the high, even the stupendous value of doing work that they want to do, would not close the awful crevasse between the rich and the poor. Nor would it reverse the heating of the earth. Nor the spread of terrorism.

From literally the first day in Flint, we obstinately reiterated that there would have to be two parallel, related efforts that would be wholly disconnected from each other, and yet both at the same time as connected as pitch and volume are in a sound. There is no sound that does not have both. The two prongs are both new ways of using the new technologies that we have now achieved. Both, are ways of moving with elegance and grace, so as not to be drowned by the tsunami wave, but instead be lifted

by it, and thus make use of its gigantic force.

The name of it is self-making, and it is nothing like the old-fashioned peasant self-providing. It is not at all the same as making your own cheese or bread. But it is also very far from simply making use of the next generation of vastly more intelligent machines. Much more flexible and versatile robots are of course just around the corner, and the so-called fabricators will be a much larger step even than these robots into a vastly more advanced mode of manufacturing. But the transition to self-making is much more than any step up to any set of new machines – even up to fabricators. It is best compared to the enormous transformation that moved us from agriculture up to industry. It is a complete, comprehensive forward alteration that includes everything, from the whole wherewithal of material production up to how and where we live, and beyond that to our social and political organization.

A mass of unbelievably dispersed efforts are by now already underway in the direction I am going to describe. The most common, most widely known, is probably outsourcing. But there is a legion more: there is the Open Source Movement, there is the movement towards global villages, there is the immense river-system that flows in the direction of miniaturization, of making smaller things, or of putting more content or more functions into a smaller space. There is the development of modular factories, that are mobile and small and can be “snapped together” in a few hours time. Beyond all that there are myriads of specific, broader or narrower inventions, some of which have to do with growing food, some with building either houses or large halls, some with new ways of generating electricity, or of refining bio-fuel, and truly, on and on. In the very center of this tumultuously growing hive of innovations is like a massive tree, the internet itself. In retrospect it might become apparent that the most sweeping of all changes that the internet made possible is the development of self-making.

One of the truly spectacular innovations of our age is the fabricator. In essence it is conceivably a step forward comparable in size to the step represented by the invention of the computer. In a single sentence, fabricators are devices that rival the power that computers have in the realm of information with the power

that they possess in the material world: out of microscopically thin layers that are welded on top of each other with a laser, fabricators are able to make a huge diversity of things. Their dissemination will advance self-making at a speed that it is now still difficult to imagine.

To give a first idea how all of these could be bundled, and given a surprising, but also incredibly powerful new direction I will raise a straightforward question about mass-production.

Consider this: The virtues, advantages and benefits of mass-production have been hammered into our heads from the time we were no more than three years old. Our heads were held under a constant water-stream of pictures: pictures of milk-bottles racing through curves on assembly lines, of light-switches flowing en masse down giant shoots, of thousands of lipsticks tipping from a moving belt down into large containers. And there of course has also been the never ending gush of advertising and brainwashing rhetoric. Supposedly all of mankind lived in the straights of poverty, and even kings did not have swimming pools, till mass-manufacturing was invented. Given the thoroughness of this pre-conditioning, it will be useful to prepare yourself for a mild shock. We prattle on about innovative, novel thinking, and making our way out of the box: well, this will be an actual case of it, and make the most of the next few minutes of fresh air.

Allow yourself to be childlike and simple, and ask: How much do the ingredients for a lipstick cost? Do ask yourself the same about the ingredients for a shampoo, or a hair-conditioner, or toothpaste? In each case the answer is: no more than a few pennies. Nobody needs to tell you how much any of these things cost in the nearest drugstore. Depending on the décor of the store, it can easily be ten times the price of the ingredients.

These doltish steps suffice to carry us already to a stiletto-probing question: Where does the difference in cost come from? Let us be conservative and ask: what is it that the other four/fifth pay for? What is more, if you merely hold these two against each other: the price of the ingredients and the five-fold price you pay, just that should be enough to purse your lips as an indication of your intelligence, and to wonder, of course just tentatively, whether mass-manufacturing really is as self-evidently and

beyond all doubt the incomparably cheapest way to shower us with consumer-goods?

I said tentatively, so let me elaborate a little. A very abrupt answer to the question “where do the other 80% come from?” would be to say: that is the cost of marketing. A more patient answer would enumerate: There is of course the mixing of the ingredients (but that is very simple in these cases), and there is the packaging (which is ludicrously wasteful), and there are the expenses associated with displaying the product in a store, and then of selling it, and there is in addition the cost of advertising, the marketing in a narrower sense, (the amount spent just on this could stun you.) The fact is that we have become utterly inured to this long caravan of expenses. When we hear mass-manufacturing we only see the can-openers streaming down into a container. The additional high stack of expenses never enters our mind. Someone has made very sure that this does not happen.

It would be a supercilious error to dismiss this with a smirk, as yet another juggling act with a glittering idea. Nothing could be further from the truth. What I have just summarized is by now tried and true and on top of that extraordinarily successful and lucrative praxis. What is more, most of the readers of this, know it and have benefited from it. The difference is only that the ideas are not usually so explicitly spelled out.

The ideas are those of Guenter Faltin, who developed his celebrated “Teekampagne” on their base. His immediately recognizable silver bags of tea are a staple on the shelves of countless kitchens. From that beginning he has developed a spate of other flourishing enterprises, and at this point has built up a growing school of young entrepreneurs, which he calls his lab. He teaches in Berlin and we are close friends.

Faltin is a passionate devotee of simplicity, and it is major part of the secret of his success. Early on, he decided that he would have no truck with the razzle-dazzle of the ten thousand varieties of tea. He would do his utmost to identify the one very best kind of tea, and he would sell it in only one single packaging, and only in one single size. He would make use of these and in addition of all the other cost-cutting strategies I have listed. He

put his faith into the slogan: “The ultimate in quality at an incredible low price.” With that for a slogan the monies others spend on advertising could be saved as well. His tea would become known through rumors, gossip and the Internet.

It borders on the incredible and downright weird, but I had a close long-lasting partnership with one of the most celebrated iconic heroes of the American automobile industry who years ago developed a set of amazingly similar ideas – except not for tea but for cars instead. His name was Heinz Prechter. He had come to the US as an exchange student from Germany and that is how we first met, but he became as respected in the auto industry in the US as Steve Jobs is in USA

One day in '94, he took me out for dinner and explained that he wanted to introduce a wholly different way to manufacture cars. Manufacturing was his religion; when he pronounced the word he half-closed his eyes. His opening pitch was unforgettable, and took off from a comparison. He said: “In the American Army the ratio is one to nine. Out of any ten soldiers there is only one who actually fights. The other nine sit in offices, prepare food, plan out logistics, and God knows what other things, but they are not anywhere near where bullets fly. The automobile industry is exactly the same way. Out of any ten, nine make up schedules, write reports, stand around in posh suits because they try to sell, supervise and manage and whatever else – but out of the ten there is only one who is actually “making things.” Prechter was not the only one in Michigan who also pronounced “making things” like a cantor singing the first words of a service. I propose to get rid of the other nine. All they represent is waste! Waste ! Waste!

Here is how it can be done without them.

“People will of course say that I am mad but you don't need all of those offices, and even less the Cafeterias and the Parking lots, and the tall building with 15 layers of managerial hierarchy – you don't – all you really need is the very few, the one in ten who is actually “makes something.”

We do not need big factories. Factories cost large amounts of money. And we will not be doing anything, way over the top or

drastic. We just take outsourcing three or four steps further. Why is everybody outsourcing everything they can? Because even the bean-counting guys know that small is more competitive and faster. So we don't just go small, we go really small, smaller than anybody went so far.

We put exactly those machines that we need to make one specific set of parts into a shop the size of a garage. Only those machines and not one lace more. And into that shop goes nobody except the people that are absolutely needed. Then they can go ahead and make the parts. Garages, dotting the green, rural countryside is all we need. Maybe we will need about 40 or 50 of these to make all of the parts needed for a whole car. Some of the parts we obviously will be buying.

There are already people ordering their cars over the Internet. (Remember this was said in '94) This, too, we will take a few steps further. The order for a car that goes out of someone's computer will automatically go to exactly those closest by garages that make the parts needed for his car. Out of all the different savings, in wasted space, personnel and capital investment, this will be by head and shoulders the biggest one. Basically, we are in addition to all the other items, also eliminating the huge cost that goes in the assembling, and the biggest part of this is not labor, it is the equipment, the miles of interconnected computerized machines.

By means of this super-streamlined manufacturing process, we can turn out a high quality, durable, safe, performance vehicle for certainly no more than one fifth of the current prize.

I myself will be designing this car. No one else will get near it, that I promise you. And designing it will be a stretch! It will be the most challenging task of my career. For this car will have to be elegant: it will have to look as if the father had been a Ferrari and the mother a Porsche. If it's not people will not buy it. But I will have to design it in a new and different way, and absolutely, from the first nut up. Because it will be the first car – and that is my really hot idea – that will not be assembled in a plant that cost 20 Million in investment just for the machines on both sides of the line. It will be designed so that it can be assembled with no more than the bag of tools that you can purchase in the next hardware

store. That obviously won't be easy, but I have been searching for a challenge, and this car will be my legacy.

This, of course, also means that the car will be vastly, drastically simpler than cars are now. (There, too, are similarities to Faltin.) In fact, that will be part of the marketing strategy. There are people who are sick of the addition, every year, of still more tricky gadgets, still more that is not really needed, superfluous embroidery. The car will be marvelously elegant but simple. Huge saving, maybe the biggest saving of all, will do away with the waste of 30 000 different models. One basic model, and that manufactured in every country of the world. If there is only one it will mean an astronomical number of units, and that will bring the price down yet one notch further.

I can give it lots of elegance, and I will make very sure that it passes all the tests, and in addition it will possess quality, and quality up to the roof – if in spite of all that it will be spectacularly cheap then that will be NEWS (remember Faltin's tea.), it will be an affront, a scandal. That will make advertising it superfluous. The gossip will do the branding, the marketing and much of the selling for us – and that again will minimize the cost.

Give me two more minutes, he said, stopping me before I had started: I know the pampered people that live in these parts are of course too lazy, to assemble a car by themselves with their own hands. This is one of my big reasons for asking you to come in on this: This will be the car for the other four billions, those who live in the second world. I will need your help, your connections, the knowledge you have of the second world to position the car that we will make together in that market. Wait, there is one other thing: even if I insist that the car is not for the U.S., and even if I shout fifty times a day, that they need not worry, that this is a car for the "Other four Billion" (that is a sentence that Prechter much repeated, and that also appeared in many documents.) they will not only say that I am crazy, they will tar and feather me.

If I can pull off savings that will amount to 4/5th of the car, and that's what I am bent on doing, then I will need YOU to run interference. The unions will be hollering for my scalp, even louder than management. They will be afraid of the biggest lay-

offs yet. That is where I will be needing you, seven days a week. You will have to explain that this need not be a disaster. That this instead can be the ladder up to work they really want! I think if we appear together, if you assure them that you and I are partners in this program, then maybe they won't fight it. Maybe if the two of us strengthen and support each other, then this car will not be a threat to them, but will be, like you say, "one more way of surfing higher.""

In the next few months, I felt amazed and bewildered. Some of the best known people in the whole industry joined us, people whose names I had heard before, but who I never had expected to be part of a group, a team that included me. What surprised me of course by far the most, was that these men who clearly were the leading lights of the American thinking and engineering about cars, agreed with the fundamental tenets of New Work.

Then – I could never have imagined that something that seemed like a hundred different plants all with their roots in different places, could wilt with such sudden absolute abruptness. The news that Heinz Prechter had committed suicide traveled like a flame along a streak of gasoline. Only his very closest friends knew that in spite of his stunning success and the adulation he received, he suffered from ghastly, wrenching bouts of depression. He had mentioned it to me, but that did not pillow the incredulity I felt by much. Since it is part of the story, I should not omit that the obituaries in the Detroit papers, talked about the last amazing car on which he had been working.

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About a decade passed. By then I had developed a friendship with Guenter Faltin and we had talked a great deal about the astonishing similarities between Prechter's ideas and Faltin's own. For many months we both played with the notion that Faltin should go on from his other enterprises to a climactic one in which he would take what Prechter had started and add to that his own great talent and network, to now produce the first car that would leap beyond and out of the age of factories. Faltin is a splendidly seasoned entrepreneur, and he is therefore circumspect like a fox that has seen many hunters. Many conversations started early in the morning and ended after the

evening had arrived. After a long string of these he said that he was ready to decide and that we would go ahead. He right away insisted that our first step would not be the founding of a company. "First we will create a platform; an Internet website that will help us to create the base. We will invite people in every country on the globe to contribute their best ideas to this project. Those who have ideas ingenious enough for us to use we will invite to participate in our venture.

Even though we at this point are only working on the drafts for this website, the up-rush of interest in it has much in common with the eagerness of the best auto-people thirteen years ago. E-mail inquiries already land on our pages like snowflakes in a storm. Many of them are from small impassioned groups that have been developing their version of an electric car for years, others are from renowned experts, who are specialists in quite recondite areas which fill a sharply defined area in our emerging scheme. The car will be very light in weight, so we have been receiving a host of different suggestions that deal with ways of calming the fears that such cars provoke. Using adapted ejection seats from planes, for example. Electric cars are in any case vastly simpler than the combustion engine kind. So there is no reason why they should not have a greatly expanded life-time, which in turn has brought us scores of suggestions about materials for the body that would not scratch or buckle, but would, for example "bounce back" like pin-pong balls. But there are also numerous larger groups like, e.g. the ((Solar in Germany)) that are already in an exchange with us.

How – i.e. specifically by whom and in what location, and with how much assistance and in what time-frame – the cars will actually be put together has of course been a hotly discussed topic for a long time. This is one area that particularly fascinated Faltin even in the first rounds of our conversations, and that problem has turned his head into a Flintstone from which sparks fly in showers. We have been talking about a large and splendid looking, high "Hall" in a conspicuous, open space in which a whirlwind of things will happen in addition to the assembling of the cars. There should be plants, and even trees but also flowers in profusion. Music and food, of course. It should have the feel of a fair, of a party and a circus, and in addition also that of a sport's events. Being "allowed" to spend some time working on a car

should be a reward, something that one can only do if one has drawn the equivalent of a lucky number. Naturally, there also will be prize-winning expert mechanics who will supervise, but that goes without saying.

Halls that are “Centers” have, of course, been the core unit of New Work from the days of Flint. Especially, in every one of our efforts in the second world, (Detroit very much included) the establishment and furnishing of a large space in which people could meet, and dance, and pray and meet together – meet so they could talk and reach community decisions – has virtually been a must. The fit with the now evolving car-project could not be more fortuitous. Wherever we have projects or are beginning to establish one we can make the setting up of a “garage” in which parts for the car will be made, but also the providing of space and tools and training for the assembling of cars an integral part of what the project might comprise. Since we have already done some work in Africa, China, South America, Japan, Indonesia and Thailand this does mean that getting a foot into the door for our car in those markets might not be too difficult.

We have a special reason for insisting quite as strongly as we do that the building of this car will have top start up simultaneously in fifty different widely dispersed countries. Right this year you can see a film with the title: who killed the electric car. That electric car was the EV 1. I was very close to some of the people who developed it, in around '94. It was a spectacular success, but it was so much simpler, and would have lasted so much longer, and would have been such a disaster for the oil-industry that General Motors managed to get control, and literally tracked down and purchased every individual EV1. They then crushed it and shredded it to small bits. That is what we mean to prevent, and building the car at the same time in so many different places will make it impossible for General Motors to kill it once again.

But our hopes for the car are also very focused on Europe and the United States. In South Africa we have been evolving projects for as long as seven years. Since 70% of the population live close to destitution the idea of a “second” self-making economy has spread there with great speed. That communities should grow their own food (and that they therefore need compost toilets, and

water filters, and “Vertical Gardens”), but that they in addition should also generate their own electricity, build their own houses, and produce their own fuel is in the second world no longer far from becoming common sense. This is different in the first world. And hence a car that is no longer built in factories but instead can be self-assembled.

Why a car?

In a nutshell: Because self-making is spectacularly more economical and ecologically like a saint compared to a profligate and only the self-making of a car will achieve the breakthrough that is needed. The car is the quintessential symbol of a country's modern industrial success. It is at the same time the symbol of the potency of mass-manufacturing. If that huge symbolic load can be shifted from the now dying economy to the economy that is now struggling to be born then we may yet turn the horrors of the tsunami into the glory of riding it with skill.

Once some of the young and superbly gifted geek-inclined (??) have with their own hands participated in the self-making of a car something like a mirthful stampede might occur: if a car can be made that way, then certainly also TV sets, washing machines, stoves, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, microwave-cookers and ice-cream machines. The recognition of this should cause wondrous, storm-like sigh of relief! Maybe the serfdom that we allowed ourselves to accept, the forty-five year sentence that we served doing work that we experienced as a mild disease, was after all not needed. For the panoply of merchandise can now be seen for what they are: toys, trinkets, bagatelles that we can snap together while we are half asleep.

Among the many hundreds, maybe thousands who at some point said to me: “I do know what I want, but I am sorry, even if you think of me as a wining, squirming worm, I still cannot do it,” there has not been a single one who then went on to explain, that he could not do it because there was a lampshade that he had to buy. In clashing contrast to this there have been many hundreds who did explain: it is because of the eight monthly bills that they must pay. Indeed, that is why not just a number, but the great prairie-covering mass of humanity does not allow the question to ever look them in the eye. Instead, they shoo it from them like a

molesting fly. “Senseless, silly, infantile to ask what I really want. Over my head there hang the eight monthlies like eight swords, and I dare not even stutter, I do my job.”

It is a driveling, clownish waste of time to imagine that the exhausted weary mass of humanity will turn and pull themselves uphill towards what they really want as long as these eight dogs of hell bark at them from all four sides. So if there is to be an ascent not just of yet another platoon of the elect, but of humanity as humanity in fact is, then these eight have to be bound and tamed. Dogs they will remain, but they have to be reduced, (like we just reduced the cost of a car – down to 1/5th) so that only eight toy-poodles will be wagging their tails at us when a new month begins.

The great and varied number who have worked on this ascent for years have managed to narrow that distance a great deal. But first: Who are the eight? The largest item and the one at the top of the budget of families that are short of cash is most often: Rent. Then second comes: Transportation, i.e. the car and gas. Third: utilities. Fourth is quite often: phone. Fifth commonly is: Food. Sixth is: Education. Seventh: medical expensed, and eighth: Insurance and saving for retirement.

The shrinking of these eight (down to Dachshund size) must be easy, uncomplicated, a smooth and gentle slide; otherwise it just won't happen. Therefore, the putting together, of the car, must be a little like a new rock (??) CD publication party. It must not be hard, not take too much time, and the result must be cool looking, so one can show it off. It absolutely must not look like a motorized baby-carriage that would be driven only by the member of a fundamentalist sect. Crucial is that it will only cost 1/5th of what cars cost now. But that saving is not made for high-flying ideologically freighted reasons. On the contrary, in the forefront is the unashamedly pragmatic and mundane. The idea is just to begin to shift the balance. To be by that small measure less indentured to the job-system, and some steps closer to pursuing work that I will really choose to do.

Similarly with fuel. Generating electricity, for other uses, but also for the batteries that drive the car, should not be done in one's own basement or backyard. That is too cumbersome and

too expensive. It should be connected with the Hall, with the larger group, the neighborhood, the village. There are even now a colorful variety of ways to make electric current not in colossal hydro-projects, but far cheaper with small decentralized devices, of which voltaic cells are not necessarily the cheapest or the best. If one chooses carefully whatever fits the local circumstances best, then the price – especially compared to what one spends for gasoline – will also be significantly less.

The contrast in the instance of the monthly bills one pays for the phone is particularly stark. It is as if the main theme of the music you have been listening to is played by six trumpets. On one side there is the laming dependency on it of low income people. If they run out of minutes, which often happens twice a week the blood in the body of their life no longer circulates. So they constantly scrape together their last pennies to buy more. It is the phone that pushes millions of people to the very edge of destitution, and has them dangle over the abyss. On the other side, some of the latest conquests in technology – wifi and skype – have made it possible to phone for hours half around the world for a few pennies. One could not ask for a clearer case of how technology can crush but also with a slight turn raise instead.

Just as with the assembling of the car, here too, the existence of a Hall in which much can be taught and done jointly with others is indispensable. Currently, precisely those to whom these technological frontier-gains would make the biggest difference have no access to them. Again this is a situation where an improvement would not be difficult to make. One could teach those things quickly in the exuberant atmosphere of a Hall and one more of the intimidating monthly bills would shrink down to a petty size.

For many people, the planting of a garden is the self-evident first symbolic step towards greater self-reliance. But cutting the monies one pays for food, takes more thought than one sometimes imagines. Here, too, the having of a Hall is perhaps, surprisingly, the point around which a great deal turns. Tiny gardens are a pleasure, but they almost never make an economic difference that is significant. Also, for many penurious people planting a garden is an admission of defeat, a signal that one has failed. That cultural dimension has so much weight that we

achieved success in the inner cities of the U.S. only after we had introduced the Vertical Gardens that were developed by the “risk-running” youths in Vancouver. Growing food vertically and not on the ground was novel, and was in so many respects obviously more intelligent than the old-fashioned way, that people could do it with panache and pride. Vertical Gardens are also so very much more economical that the cost of food can be cut with them.

But the issue of size is equally important. If part of the Hall is a greenhouse, which goes very well with the festive mood that self-manufacturing needs, and that greenhouse is large enough to be used by the entire neighborhood, and one has Vertical Gardens in that larger space, then the expenses for food can be squashed as well.

I believe there now exists a worldwide consensus that schools in their present shape, constitute a maiming disaster, and that the entire institution must hence be re-thought and re-built. Against that background, I would propose that the polarity in regard to the bills for education has some resemblance to the monies we pay for the phone.

On one side, the costs of education have spiraled upwards to the point where parents live in terror even before the birth, and the grandparents lay nest eggs till they hurt, just so that college can be paid for when that distant time arrives. On the other side, just in the area of education the now available technologies are awesome. Again, in the context of a Hall, the acquiring of competence and knowledge could cost even less than 1/5th with the kind of coaching and mentoring and of course also technological equipment that could be offered there. That, too, should be considered if the ascent up into a future in which parents would have greater freedom is at stake. If such Halls existed, and it would be easy to establish them, then fewer parents would be saying: sure, I do know what I really and passionately want, but are you prepared to put my kid through school?

The next hurdle raised, after food and education, is often security. “I want to do things that excite and fascinate and arouse me as much as the next person. But what will happen fifteen or twenty years from now? I need to protect myself for

when I am older, and to me that means choosing what is safe, and not whatever makes me feel most alive.”

Expressed in this reservation is a wholesale misunderstanding of what we are about. We absolutely and totally do not want to sprinkle an inspirational message from whatever kind of platform. We are as far as anyone could be from piping into people’s ears the invitation to follow their latest whim, and to step blindfolded out of a window on the 82nd floor. That wholly misses our one most central point. At issue is a program, a political agenda, an effort to give to our society and culture a direction which they now lack. There always have been headstrong people, some fared well and many came to grief. We want it understood that we do think of many human beings as quite frail and that they therefore need encouragement, support and protection if they are to follow the whisper that tells them what their life could be about. So taking care and giving heed to people is what this is all about. But there is a question, and at this point this question burns: How is this to be done? How will you have safety and security in your frail old age?

For God’s sake read the papers! How many companies that looked like citadels have crashed, and have left all of their employees, who paid regularly every month standing in the rubble and the dust? How many companies will no longer pay for their retirees? There are thousands of examples of this kind and all of them are part of the pruning, and maiming, and butchering of all of work that the great wave brought in its wake.

There is an alternative to making monthly payments into funds that are now as insecure as eggs rolling off a table. We add one more dimension to what happens in the Hall. As the years pass people will move from Hall to Hall but it will be natural to establish one more lasting and evolved relationship as one grows more elderly. Obviously, one will know numerous people who also come to that Hall, and one will have done different kinds of work in it. That work might be writing software, or building refrigerators, or training children, or raising broccoli in the greenhouse. All of that work will be part of the self-making that these people do. There is no reason whatsoever that this should at some point should be cut off as with a knife. Far from that. As one grows older one will simply do less of the self-making work

and that gradual transition will be far less traumatic than abruptly being banished into retirement at some arbitrary point. Important for the Ascent, for more people coming closer to doing work they intensely want to do, is that this will mean that still another of the monthly terror bills will either cease altogether to exist or be much smaller than it is now.

We have saved the first and biggest amount that one must pay almost for the last: that is the rent, the payment for the house. Here, too, a polarity has taken shape: Space in Manhattan is now so exorbitant, that investors purchase future parking lots for over 30.000 dollars, so that they can rent them out once the building stands. But, as in every other case that we have looked at, with the right technologies and enough ingenuity one can reduce the price to a small fraction. One easy opening is very simply the Hall that serves so many functions. Apart from the car this is one other project on which we work with energy and much assistance at the moment: Why not combine the use of one commodious and wide space, in which there are computers, and tools, and easy chairs and all manner of equipment with a very much smaller, very much cheaper (costing perhaps just 1/5th) very personal, very private, moveable house? How such a house could be designed so that it could be almost wholly self-built is one of the projects that we are beginning to develop with the SPES Academy in Schlierbach, in Upper Austria.

THE ASCENT TO 2020

We can now see, as if projected up against a wall, the EITHER/OR that our motto sentence announced on the first page of our original brochure. The Either has brought us the crevasse between the rich and the poor, and terrorism and the heating of the earth. Not enough with that, it also brought us the Decimation of Work and the Burning of the Violins.

But by now we can also see the beginnings of the Or. If we use the now available technologies with "intelligence and skill," then we can with their help create a broad, firm base. By no means only what is needed for subsistence, with the whole range of the different modes of self-making people can not just grow themselves their own food, and generate the electricity they need, they also can build their own houses, and far more up all

the way to the self-assembling of their own cars, and also as we saw – really the whole array of what makes possible a comfortable modern life. Very important, not just in one country, but with the right use of the right technologies that could spread across the globe. This would constitute even more than progress in the alleviation of poverty. And it would not be a mere mass distribution of an unheard of quantity of alms. It would be wholly different from that. People would make this base with their own strength. In the process they would learn an imposing variety of skills, and they would also gain respect and pride and admiration for themselves and for each other. So abolished would not just be poverty. One could say that those who have been called “the wretched of the earth” would not be wretched any more. And that would be true also for the other appellations: They would no longer be the proletariat, or the underclass or the truly disadvantaged. It would mean in the words of a famous sentence, that we have taken possession of the means of production, but in a very different and far superior fashion than the one the author of that dictum misbegotten had in mind.

We said from the start that the extremity we face means even more than this possibility. The fantastic gift that technology is offering to us includes that this base can be realized not with endless hard and heavy work, but with a minimal amount of the biblically notorious sweat. If we had such halls then many might spend a great deal of time in them. But the must, the part that would be self-making work, would be very small. More than six hours a week should not be required. All the needs, the necessities, and not for subsistence but for a comfortable modern life, could be provided with our left foot.

The true Ascent would lie very much in that ease, in that lack of effort and of strain. Long, sweet, undulating stretches of time would be left over. And all of that time would not be spent sleeping on a waterbed. Certainly, in this 2020 we would be rid of the whip-cracking hectic, and the stomach-ulcer making stress. But there in any case would have to be one other major element of this kind of life. The part that provides a certain quantity of CASH.

Obviously, there is much that cannot be self-made: we want to travel, we want to buy tickets for concerts and the theater, we

will probably pay taxes, and of course a host of other things. And also, what we do self-make will only cost about 1/5th of what we are spending now, but that 1/5th has to be paid and earned.

So clearly, thirteen years from now people will still be doing some work just for money. The huge exhilarating difference is that they also will be doing other things – they will do self-making and also chosen work. Given the modest expenses, and that the majority will also receive some compensation for their chosen work, about ten hours a week for cash should be enough.

The very last thing we imagine is that people will be doing some self-making work in a Hall, and that they will then pound the pavement in search of a ten-hour job. As we see it, we are in the very early stages of the development of a different economy, and that economy will require new materials, new machines, new software, new manuals of instruction and much else. We are in the best possible position to create the business enterprises that will make these things, and that is what we have begun to do. In Kiel and in Stuttgart, we have begun to work on this with groups of experienced entrepreneurs, and the intention is to associate these businesses with the halls, and to structure them from the outset so that ten hour schedules will be the normal and accepted pattern.

This sounds like a minor matter, but it actually opens the door to a comprehensive new perspective. One way of putting it would be to say that no car, no matter how light, electrical or clean could greatly change the ecological or climate situation. Decisive, ultimately, will be how cars will be used. And there lies the difference. If the larger part of the work that people do will take place in the Halls then we will no longer bring the people to the work, but the other way around: work will have come to the people. And that spells the end of commuting. And that indeed would make an enormous difference to smog and oil and peoples lives. So if the question is: what does the Ascent propose to do against the heating of the earth, then the answer is not: create a totally new car. It is: create a mode of life where work will be where the people are, so they no longer have to drive to it.

In the case of global warming, the mild changes that are constantly proposed, are not just fatuous and silly, they are to my

mind, dangerous. The analogy is to a thousand medical situations: Putting warm compresses on a breast cancer, gives the patient the illusion that something is being done, and lulls him into deeper layers of delusion. That is what we are doing with new-fangled light-bulbs and (I am afraid) hybrid cars.

For the Cultural Ascent

The changes that need to happen go very deep.

Revolutions so far have been costume balls, a changing of the buttons. What has begun to happen is vastly more than any revolution could possibly accomplish.

We do not need work for production. We in the oasis are suffocating in excess and opulence. We can give to work a wholly and completely different function. It's purpose should be the raising up of people, the coaxing them from one rung up to the next.

The basically totally different posture towards people – that they should not be socialized but strengthened instead, that is the basis on which a new culture can be built. Not hard to see that this will have implications for the training of the young but also for culture far beyond that early training, and clearly for politics. The quintessence of politics will no longer be to bring the weakest up to the level on which we are – i.e. no longer what American Liberalism (Rawls) was.

For one, reverse the perception of work: turn work from punishment, from a payment extorted from us, from mild disease, into the force that raises us, that gives us energy and strength, that makes us human. At long last we can have the liberation through the power and the strength of work.

Reverse also the perception of technology, from the growth that turns our rivers into sewage and makes rain poisonous to instead see in it the immense and mighty force that makes it possible for us to not be crippled any more by work, but to instead do work that we seriously choose to do.

The highest virtue of work is not that it can be hard. We need

a sustained effort to describe precisely the different experiences of work. Did it feel scrumptious, tantalizing? Would you describe it as delicious, splendid in its taste? Gradually, we should develop wholly different associations with work. We should assist people to gradually reach the position where they became immediately and openly aware of how strengthening, how self-confirming, how life-enhancing chosen work really is.

It is not enough to abolish the crippling arrangements. That is not sufficient. Most people need a life-long very intelligent, knowing expert coaching – that is the real meaning of the “human upwards climb.” We have become accustomed to the fact that a great number of people “see” somebody, i.e. they have a session with a counselor or a therapist once a week. That maybe more needed in the area of work: we need a new profession. Tens of thousands of people who are expertly trained in the whole science of “how work is changing,” but beyond that in how to accompany people in the climb – past slippery spots, and tough over-hangs - up to the work that they might seriously choose to do. It should become entirely normal for someone to say: I am having an appointment with my “Ascent Coach.”

Understanding the “Polarity of Work” should also be part of the Cultural Campaign. That work can cripple people, even outright kill them, but that it can also do the opposite, invigorate, strengthen, encourage, empower - - and importantly that work does this with more success than anything else so far discovered. Indeed, the Ascent in which we are engaged is only possible because work has that developing, strengthening, invigorating power.

How bright, how alive, how much more cheerful in our 2020 working people would very likely be, how very different from workers now who on a bus look like prisoners being transported to another camp.

To help people, especially those who have been low-wage for a long time, to think differently about what work can be say to them: work need not cripple people like the feet of Chinese women. Work can be the most potent therapeutic ladder. It can be Muenchhausen, pulling himself up to the moon with magnets. It can be like an elixir in a fairy tale; it is what becoming a prince

or a princess or a hero was all about. It can be like Hercules performing his tasks, like the adventures of Odysseus on his way home. The one most memorable sentence, in which this is said most beautifully is when the character in *On the Waterfront*, played by Marlon Brando says: "I could have been somebody, I could have been a contender."

We have developed and invented; we are a shrewd and impressive race, we have cumulatively put together the tools that make it possible for every person to become self-making, and also on the side to earn some supplemental cash, so that we all could then with by far the greatest part of our energy and time do something that we with determination want to do.

The experience of chosen work is wholly different from the words we normally connect with work. Whatever it is, it is not hard and heavy but instead light and bubbly like champagne, scrumptious, exhilarating, delicious and arousing, enough to make one bushy-tailed. But it is also like composing for musicians that live a bohemian life – nothing else matters, is of any consequence and therefore it would have a huge effect on consumerism as soon as it became wide-spread. The clutter of commercial products cannot stand the comparison to the thrilling high of doing work that one really wants to do. Indeed, Sex has to be very good, to hold its own against the prickling pleasure of good work. And the pleasure that it gives can be so frequent and so intense that a group in which many have this has a very different feel from other groups: they sparkle, they enflame each other, they spiral upwards into heights of smiling mirth.

For the Political Ascent

It is preposterous and monstrous and absurd to go on as we have been going. We only allowed it to happen, because an alternative was nowhere to be seen. That is precisely what has changed. There now is an alternative.

Possibly the single most important political action would be to give support to the creation of new enterprises that would develop self-making further. These should at the same time be enterprises that embody the basic Ascent ideas about work. This

would probably be the most powerful and effective way to politically drive the Ascent further up.

The Ascent will appeal to a host of different groups, and the task of helping to braid them together, will be one of its most challenging but also useful efforts. Among these are the talented, the computer-fascinated sometimes called the geeks, the fed up, the concerned, feminists, progressives, ecologically minded people, and importantly of course, all those who believed in some shade of Socialism at some point in their lives, and who have been drifting ever since their disillusionment.

Just as there now are laws against child-labor, sweat-shops and working conditions that are unsafe, so there could be laws against not making use of talents that people have, of making people work below the level of their capacity. People could register complaints, and inspectors would from time to time appear.

There also could be laws against having people perform work that can be done by machines. Possibly there should be laws against people being used for certain specific jobs – some work now is considered “too dangerous.” Perhaps, being a waitress should be considered to be “too harmful to one’s self-respect.”

Imagine an outburst: how the Ascent politics would sound in anger: “Ask, demand, insist, shout from the rooftops that we need the kind of Halls that we have been discussing! Halls in which people can feast and dance and play, but in which they can also manufacture and grow the food they need. Why should we wait in line and beg and be most grateful for jobs that numb our brains, and cripple our backs and our feet?”

After “The Eight” we can say to people: No excuses, not quite as in the past. If we can develop these from the car right to the Halls then work that they want to do will be possible for everyone.

Suggestion of how one could talk to a disillusioned but still wistful “person of the Left:” What if we moved in the direction of using fancy numerically controlled devices that are able to make things in the way in which we use our personal computers now?

Might that not mean that we could provide for our genuine needs with very little sweat and in ludicrously brief spans of time? If we could manage that, would that not mean, that indeed, we had now taken control of the “means of production,” only of course in a totally and whole different way, from the one which the famous author of that sentence unfortunately had in mind? Great numbers of people who are seasoned experts in the ways of manufacturing know that, astoundingly enough, we are much closer to this than the people of whom we say that they are “in the street” imagine. That fact should like a flashlight give a first glimpse of how an upwards-zooming Ascent conceivably could actually occur.

The Talented

There is the world-wide connected culture of the talented, who meet each other in the virtual cyber-space, and are maybe the main engines of the scientific and economic advances we achieve. They are mightily attracted to the combination of self-making on a less posh plane, and to receiving in exchange for that greater freedom in their work. Anyone who has had much contact with them knows that fact.

Many of them will with happiness join in the Ascent, for they already know about doing their chosen work. And it is like an addiction, like a drug. They are very like artists that live in a bohemian way. Other stuff no longer matters, they do easily without. Somebody should make an effort to explain our combination of self-making and doing one’s chosen work to this marvelously cosmopolitan community. Having them on our side would be invaluable!

This as a wake-up call for the people who think that it always was this way, and who are looking for their second and third (simultaneous) waitress job: “Everything that has to do with work has been clobbered, hammered and beaten to a pulp. Don’t even think about small changes. Also, not small changes in your life. What we are offering is a Big Change, and that is obviously difficult; but if we fail, then the whole rest of your life, will be like your life is now.

Meeting the people where they are: We did go to all these different places and we did discover that yes, indeed, they do respond to our question. And we decided that we could build on this. But distinguish, there are the giant problems in the distance, but there are the things most immediate to us, they are summed up in the “cutting down of work.”

But how will “do what you really care about” help people who are working two and three jobs? It does help to end the indifference, the apathy, the paralysis, the low moral – but that of course is not enough! And we never ever thought that from the start. From the beginning we knew that the great wave, the tsunami coming our way, could not to be reversed, could not be turned back. To imagine that is ridiculous! The task is to get on top of it, to surf (??) to ride it, to make it serve us! And how do we do this? By advancing step by step, relentlessly, towards a self-making economy, which will free us up enough, to do work that we with our soul and our heart want to do.

Recognize that it would be an enormous, general frog-leap improvement, like nothing else on the horizon. If people gained control over their work, if they had the wherewithal to change their work in stages till it would be incomparably better than it now is, till it was work that they would choose to do, if that was not just a whimsical quick thought, but a serious agenda, a goal that with determination we could reach - - then we would have an Ascent like none we had before.

Question, key question for the future: Will the Ascent have enough inspirational appeal to create a counterforce to hold the spreading fascist bands in check?

Related question: will there be some who will believe in the Ascent with idealism, with the guts and the passion it will need?

The great step forward that a self-making economy represents to people near the bottom: Above all much less effort, the wherewithal for daily life, the equipment we need to survive, can be gotten with no more than six hours work per week.

Terrorism

One of my hopes for the South African project is that some of my South African friends will help to further the foundations for the development of a self-making economy in Morocco and the Middle East, very much in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and as soon as at all possible of course also in Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. As we know electricity, decent housing, food and the other necessities for a modern comfortable life are not enough! Decisive would be once more the Ascent. If gradually the people in these countries would begin to suspect that we again have the beginnings of a culture, that we are capable not only of pornography and violence - - then a rapprochement could conceivably begin. Some Muslims have explained to me when I was in Morocco that there is a semblance between our search for what we really want, and a search that they called their "great" as opposed to their "small" (conquering) jihad.

Among the groups were we most strongly realized that we needed something else, something in addition to our question were the Indians, the at risk young, the motel room cleaners, the fast food serfs, and the chicken butchers. They responded to our question, but what they need is the self-making economy.

Our politics are thus very different from how politics these days begin. Not from guilt, from feeling that here are some that need our help so we can raise them up to our heights. Our enthusiasm for this has waned, partly because where we are seems far from wonderful. Does it still make sense to make this the mission of our lives: to help others to become like us? If we observe the people next to us riding the subway from or towards work: don't they look very like prisoners in a transport from camp to camp. To cajole and invite others into the culture we now have carries no conviction. Hence the ever wetter swamp of apathy. But asking others to join us in the Ascent, that feels right and makes sense!

What people need more than anything else to reach the point where they will actually insist and really do their chosen work, is constant, lifelong coaching all along the arduous way to that high vista point. (That's how wrong you were, Rousseau, with your wishful opening about man being free at birth.)

Dear Marxists one more time: The question we keep asking

has of course everything to do with the cataclysm of my skull-demolishing disillusionment with Marx during the years of my travels in the East. There is not much that I would not give to say loud and clear, and if I get the chance then through a megaphone, that if you have a mind to rid the world of Alienated Labor then asking our question one by one is the way to do it.

Which are the countries in which parts of the Ascent could happen very soon – prior to 2020: Brazil, India, China, the whole East including Russia, virtually all of Africa, most of South America, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Haiti – not much later Europe and the USA.

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The very last thing I want to do at this point (which is anything but an endpoint, but only an interruption to give you a break and to catch my breath) is to set goals, and with a time-schedule to boot, to give percentages of how much will have been accomplished in which year, to invite commitments, to raise expectations, or God forbid, to do any of the things that are routinely done on summits or just high meetings: my view is simple, we could have a 2020 very different from the one in which a good part of Europe has drowned and many cities are like Jerusalem is now. I have tried to describe steps that we could take. I hope that we together will!