

# reflect #06

# Urban Politics Now

## Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City

Edited by BAVO

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 Proofreading: Leo Reijnen  
 Translation Friedrich von Borries & Matthias Böttger: Nicholas Lakides  
 Translation Dieter Lesage: Leo Reijnen  
 Translation Merijn Oudenampsen: Dawn Mastin  
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<b>Introduction: Who's Afraid of Urban Politics</b>	6
BAVO	
<b>Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Urban Violence in Paris and New Orleans and Related Matters</b>	12
Slavoj Žižek	
<b>Revanchist City, Revanchist Planet</b>	30
Neil Smith	
<b>The Uses of Deprivation in the Neoliberal City</b>	44
Guy Baeten	
<b>The Post-Political City</b>	58
Erik Swyngedouw	
<b>Postmetropolitan Psychasthenia: A Spatioanalysis</b>	78
Edward W. Soja	
<b>Global Cities and Anti-Globalist Resistance</b>	94
Dieter Lesage	
<b>Amsterdam™, the City as a Business</b>	110
Merijn Oudenampsen	
<b>False Freedom</b>	128
<i>The Construction of Space in Late Capitalism</i>	
Friedrich von Borries and Matthias Böttger	
<b>Antinomies of Space</b>	141
<i>From the Representation of Politics to a Topology of the Political</i>	
Yannis Stavrakakis	
<b>The City at the 'End of History'</b>	162
Juliet Flower MacCannell	
<b>Barcode Humans</b>	182
<i>On the Fabrication of Consumers in the Super-Market Society</i>	
Henk van Houtum and Bas Spierings	
<b>Pervercity</b>	198
Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen	
<b>Democracy &amp; the Neoliberal City: The Dutch Case</b>	212
BAVO	

# Barcode Humans

## On the Fabrication of Consumers in the Super-Market Society

Henk van Houtum and Bas Spierings

*'O brave new world,' he repeated. 'O brave new world that has such people in it. Let's start at once.'*

...  
*The World Controller: 'There isn't any need for a civilized man to bear anything that's seriously unpleasant. And as for doing things – Ford forbid that he should get the idea into his head. It would upset the whole social order if men started doing things on their own. . . . And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts. And there's always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your mortality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears – that's what soma is.' . . .*

*John the savage: 'But I like the inconveniences.' 'We don't,' said the Controller. 'We prefer to do things comfortably.' 'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.' 'In fact,' said the controller, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.' 'All right then,' said the Savage defiantly, 'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.'*

Aldous Huxley

### Introduction

The above citation, a key passage in the novel, comes from the famous work by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, published in 1932. This beautiful and much-loved book presents the reader with a post-human, extremely modernistic world, a world where human beings are mass produced and are kept totally happy. First of all through the endless variation in pleasures and temptations and second, if the first option does not work, through the use of an anti-depressant, 'soma.' The last human beings who are not produced in a factory are called 'savages' and they live in a closed and fenced-off reservation far away from the 'civilized' urban world. In the passage quoted above it is the 'uncivilized' John, the 'savage,' who protests against the, in his eyes, dystopian, artificially fabricated world state of happiness, that is, the relief from pain and the achievement of sexual, individual and material fulfillment. If this is civilization, he argues, then he claims the



right to be unhappy, to have real feelings and real freedom. The dystopian future that this book shows us has been mostly seen as an apocalyptic forecast of totalitarian modernistic regimes such as communism, in the sense that in the brave new world everything and everyone belonged to each other, or such as fascism, in the sense of the genetic production of 'pure' human beings with a strict hierarchical order amongst them, and lastly as modern capitalism in the sense of mass production in what is often referred to as *early capitalism* (Fordism). In the novel by Huxley the entrepreneur Henry Ford is seen as the grounding father of what is called the 'brave new world.' The state of the new world is based on the principles of mass production introduced by Ford in his assembly line for the manufacture of Ford cars. With this introduction of mass production in the beginning of the last century he set the stage for the economization of human life, so significant for our era. Ford is worshipped as the new God in Huxley's novel. The old God is declared history ('history is bunk,' like Ford would say), he is not needed anymore. The people in the mass-produced, created civilization of the brave new world now all call Ford's name if they are excited, instead of the name God: 'Oh my Ford!' In addition, the symbol 'T,' after the first Ford model, has replaced the Christian Cross. What is more, the starting date for the calendar used in the brave new world is the date on which Henry Ford introduced his model T, that is 1908. Hence, the dates are prefaced by *A.F.*, meaning *After Ford*.

The novel has also been inspirational for current dystopian narratives involving mass production of human quasi-biological beings, genetic engineering and human cloning. In our present society, the discussion about the ethics of biological and gene-technical research is becoming increasingly important. As Sloterdijk recently has noted in his book *Regulations for the Human Park* (1999), a point also made by Fukuyama in his dystopian book *Our Posthuman Future* (2002), the fascist eugenic investigations are still overshadowing the topic of genetic engineering. Yet, the fear for biological engineering is increasingly losing terrain and is gradually being taken over by new optimism, sometimes even with a provocative admiration. With reference to the latter, Huxley's novel has for instance also inspired the works of the French writer Michel Houellebecq. Especially Houellebecq's fascinating novels *Atomised* (1998) and *The Possibility of an Island* (2005) refer to a dystopian, yet at the same utopian new world in which human beings are produced quite literally, as in Huxley's novel, in a factory.

In this essay, however, we will shed a different light on the novel by Huxley. What we are after here is: how does the brave new world of Huxley – which was a master chronicle of

the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – speak to the economic world of today, the world of globalization, hyper-capitalism, mass individualism and the parading of individual identities? Put differently, what echoes of Huxley's totalitarian brave new world can we hear in today's what in this book is referred to as *late-capitalistic* urban society?

### *Super-Market Society*

We provocatively argue that it does not take all that much imagination to connect Huxley's tale of human beings who are produced by a grand machinery, to the hyper-economic world of today. The grand machinery, however, should then not be seen in a morphological sense only. It should be seen broader, more as an imagination, as a disciplining idea. Seen in this sense, it could be argued that today's grand machinery producing our brave new world is the dominant and almost non-disputed ideology of mass consumption. What has happened over the last century is, and here we say nothing new, as this has been described by many scholars in many accounts (for instance, Urry 1990, Glennie & Thrift 1993, Miles 1998, Zukin 1998 and Spierings 2006), that we have totally changed the economic landscape of our society. We turned it up-side down in fact. We have moved from an economic system of *mass production*, often described in terms as modernism and Fordism – in which the products sold were standardized, made on an assembly line – into an economic and dominantly urban society of *mass consumption*, often described as flexible specialization, post-Fordism or post-modernism, in which not the producer but the consumer is believed to set the standard. Accompanying the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism has been the breakup of society as one and indivisible. A significant feature of the new system is the emphasis on individualism. The dogma of free choice for the individual on which the new system is based requires that human beings are all seen as individuals. We as individuals are no longer strongly locally embedded and our identities could be copied across the globe. Everybody is required to be somebody, to have a marketable identity, to be a unique 'product.' Yet, by massively following this script of competitive uniqueness, the final product may indeed be unique, but the underlying ideological framework is globally homogenized. Hence, what is emerging is a brave new world that we like to refer to as a super form of the market-society, hence the *super-market society*. Precisely for its direct connotation with the dominant marketization of our society, we prefer the term super-market above the term *super-modernism* (Augé 2000) which is now sometimes being used by some urban architects, notifying that the wave of post-modernism is passing away and is being replaced



by *super-modernism*, an absolute and non-contextual fabrication of buildings and spaces. In this super-market society, to buy in to such an identity, we must make a selection from an overwhelming and ever-increasing amount of commodities and product features which circulate the globe at high speed. The shelves of the super-market society keep on changing and are always full. The question that begs attention then is whether we as mass consumers walking around in this global supermarket have real power. We buy, but are we really in charge and control? Can we really make producers dependent on our desires and needs or is the picture somewhat more complicated? Isn't the whole idea of managerialism, marketing and serviceability, all so significant for this 'Western' late-capitalistic system, merely producing a myth, a fantasy of control? Do we really have the freedom of choice? Are we the subjects of our own control or again the slavery subjects of a now more intelligent controller that is the super-market society, in which we internalize the fantasy that power is in the hands of the consumer? To begin to shed light on these larger questions, we will first zoom in on our daily consumption practices in our shopping spaces, the local cities in the global world. We will try to find out who we are and who we want to be by consuming products, by analyzing more details of why and how we consume. We will explain how the production of the 'I' is a continuous process of construction and reconstruction, which reflects an endless and dynamic interplay between local and global dimensions. After that we will return to the overarching questions that tickle our imagination, trying to trace the ghosts evoked by Aldous Huxley's grand dystopian narrative of the modernistic brave new world that still haunt us in today's world.

### Strolling in the City: I Consume, Therefore I Am

#### *Consuming Commodities*

As consumers we stroll and gaze around shopping centers and shops to consume goods offered by the retail trade sector, the catering industry and the entertainment sector. Goods are gazed at, contemplated and perhaps also bought to define oneself, to distinguish oneself from others and to make oneself recognizable to members of the group one would like to belong to. Strolling and gazing around does not have to result into making an acquisition, however. The act of shopping in itself is already a stage act, a performance. As Shields puts it, 'everyday shopping activities are fore-grounded as if on a theatre stage, to be observed by passers-by who may vicariously participate in the bustle and lively activity of consumption without necessarily spending money' (1992: 6). Consumers have learned to approach consumption spaces as

worlds of seduction and illusion in a 'cool' manner, according to Lash and Urry (1994). Moreover, the goods we do observe but do not buy also give us an identity in addition to the goods we do acquire. Put differently, human beings do not merely consume objects, but they increasingly buy objects in order to establish or reproduce a certain status and identity. People are shopping for 'identities' in a variety of urban contexts and thereby collect and consume a variety of dimensions of the I. More and more, the I has also become a product to buy. We stroll and gaze around urban consumption spaces and consume the purposefully designed functional, social and physical features of cities (Spierings 2006). Consumer goods and shopping environments are consumed to found current identities as well as to find, select and create new identities that are on the market. In doing so, we as consumers have adopted a mobile lifestyle to find commodities, consumer cults and cities that may 'materialize' into a preferred status and lifestyle. It is both consumer goods and shopping environments we want to consume that construct our identity. We need something, someone and somewhere to belong to and to distinguishes ourselves from in order to define ourselves as consuming citizens. Most notably, it is Guy Debord (1969) who, in his book *In The Society of the Spectacle*, observed that what is consumed in contemporary 'Western' societies is actually images of objects. Consumers imagine themselves as subjects through these images. The identity of the image of the object can never be fully obtained. Buying and consuming an object is only a temporary and discontinuous attempt to establish the identity which was provoked by the image of the object. The desire is never fulfilled, for it is the constant production of new desires that defines and drives the dynamic in the economy. Hence, the desire to consume, to occupy the image of newly produced objects is endless. There remains in the subject a constant lack that makes the subject different from the ideal image of the object because the ideal image itself is never fixed but fluid, and changes all the time. The desire to be someone, to be wholesome, to fill the lack (Lacan 1966) is therefore perpetual. Society has become a commercialized desire-machine (Deleuze & Guattari 1983).

#### *The power of Seduction*

It is while shopping that we are provided with the free opportunity to look, dream and spend time without any obligation to spend money. Yet, freedom is largely an artifact in the current urban consumer-paradise. We are *seduced* to believe our own myth of freedom, and we deny at the same time that we are seduced by emphasizing the free choice of ourselves. Yet, providing a free opportunity to look at merchandise in both the shop window and



the shop itself is consciously and strategically meant to seduce the urban stroller and gazer to buy. It is through seduction that the modern human being is turned into a consumer (Bauman 1993). Yet, this is not done against our will, on the contrary. The siren's song of the consumer-paradise is heard both voluntarily and self-confidently. We prefer to shop in those urban spaces that present the most attractive lay-out and most 'unique' shops. Hence, the layout of the consumption spaces is increasingly being designed to keep visitors inside and having them contemplate commodities by passing shop windows as long as possible (Gottdiener 1986). As Goss puts it bluntly, '... the goal is to trap consumers in the world of consumption' (1993: 32). Obviously, attempting to keep people strolling and gazing is not done without reason. Crawford argues that 'by extending the period of "just looking," the imaginative prelude to buying, the mall encourages "cognitive acquisition" as shoppers mentally acquire commodities by familiarizing themselves with a commodity's actual and imagined qualities. Mentally "trying" on products teaches shoppers not only what they want and what they can buy, but also, more importantly, what they don't have, and what they therefore need' (1992: 13). The mental consumption of commodities *disciplines the desires of consumers*. In fact, people are invited to step into the ready made dream world of the shopping zone, forget the worrisome contextual reality for a while and spend timeless time in the spaceless space of the consumer paradise. It is a fantasy world made imaginatively real. Dare to dream and to be! In this zone, everything is aimed at consumers who are expected to enter shops and perform 'just looking'-behavior, along with trying (on) commodities and spending money by purchasing commodities (Gregson et al. 2002). Looking around and trying commodities shows us new possible identities and tries to sell us a better and happier 'I.' 'Armed with this knowledge, shoppers can not only realize what they are but also imagine what they could become when buying a certain commodity. And precisely that is the reason why the surrendering to the obvious seduction act of urban shopping areas is followed at will. It provides new satisfying inputs, albeit only for a short while or even a moment, for the constant re-positioning game of personal identity. Yet, the seduction-satisfaction is endless. Final satisfaction always remains just out of reach' (Crawford 1992). Shoppers are never and can never be fully or permanently satisfied in their attempt to have an up-to-date identity. A constant lack to be filled is created. The 'I' is never found and is always not yet. The desire of becoming is endless. As a consequence, '... goods and practices become things to be played with for a while, then ditched as we move to something else' (Corrigan 1997: 179).

### *Consuming the Other*

While strolling and gazing around and looking for goods to buy, consumers also consume physical and social features of the city. The urban environment, including things such as shop windows, the shop exterior and interior, street furniture, billboards as well as the shopping crowd, is consumed in a visual manner. In this context, Lynch argues that, 'moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important [for the image of the environment] as the stationary physical parts' (1960: 2). By consuming physical and social features of cities, shoppers are looking for places to feel 'at home' in and that also enable and stimulate the construction and reconstruction of a new identity. The most innovative places are wanted in particular because these places are expected to display trendy goods, show trendy people and contain trendy buildings. Consumers are looking for social groups and physical settings to connect with and become part of that trendy *urban scene* at the same time. For, to become an 'I' that does not float in a vacuum, shoppers need other 'I's in a certain spatial context to compare themselves with, to be the same as, and to be slightly different from (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002). By taking part in the hustle and bustle of shopping, the flâneur is co-performing the *spectacle* he is also observing (Debord 1969) – a spectacle, '... which is marked by the exchange of looks and gazes, complements the theatrical display of goods and commodities' (Shields 1992: 7) in consumption spaces. Shoppers show the branded bags they carry and the branded clothes they wear, thereby producing and selling themselves as commodities as well (Clarke 2003).

### *The Production of Barcode Humans*

Copying from the other is both comforting, as it produces an order, an identity, a continuity, and disconcerting, for it threatens the uniqueness of the I that is also necessary to be someone, and hence it leads to new desires, to new needs, to be different from other 'I's. The result is an endless cycle of revolving copying of the other and finding uniqueness, making us always 'not yet.' This comparison with others is now increasingly global. New and innovative street cultures from anywhere are marketed and copied everywhere, which generates generic scripts for mass consumption. The result is that we all dress according to the latest global fashion trends. Hence, the result of the system of endless competition between fashions and products, and the continuous production of desires is that we all become the same, yet believe that we are all different. According to Deleuze and Guattari capitalism works therefore as a polymorphous destroyer of codes and a constructor of a generic recode. Capitalism continually breaks



190

down the cultural, symbolic, and linguistic barriers that limit exchange (Peretti 1996). Thus, Deleuze and Guattari assert that 'civilization is defined by the decoding and deterritorialization of flows in capitalist production' (1983: 244). The result is that the stress on global competition produces a growing uniformity of urban desires, urban consumption spaces and consumers. Every urbanity and *homo urbanus* claims authenticity, yet because of that, this claim becomes a uniform script. Paradoxically therefore, the super-market society has a totalitarian and reverse effect, it involves the mass production of *barcode humans*, that is, humans who are in effect copies of each other but who brand themselves in the illusion that they themselves have carved out a unique corporeal code, ready for visual consumption by the gazing Other, which they call their I(dentity).

#### *The Age of the cam-Era*

Barcode Humans

Being a barcode human has become the commercialized way to re-centre and de-fragment the subject that we have become in the era of the super-market society. It is a way to end, what Jameson (1983) and later Deleuze and Guattari (1983) have described as cultural schizophrenia, which in their view is the epiphenomenon of the fragmented social subject in the era of post-Fordism. The current era of hyper-capitalism not only accelerates the flow of money and goods, but also accelerates the rate at which individual subjects construct identities (Peretti 1996). In our desire to have an unfragmented identity, to be someone, to construct a wholesome identity, the private world of the subject has been radically opened up to be overtly communicated with the public through commodification, branding and publicity. Hence, as want-to-be-someones, as *wannabees* we have fallen in love with the Eye of the consuming Other in the Super-Market Society.

Henk van Houtum and Bas Spierings

It is telling in this respect, that that other grand dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell, in which he portrays the world governed by an all-controlling panopticon eye of Big Brother, has now in this commercial age, been turned from the nightmare that it is supposed to be, into commercial entertainment, a TV-show that is watched by millions. People in this show volunteer to lock themselves up in order to be watched 24-hours a day by a camera, through which we the public, the Other, are watching. In doing so, they hope to find their moment of fame. The participants have become the show-master of their own show in which they wish to play the leading role. It is as if they have defined an identity that can only exist if it can be communicated publicly, if it can be branded and published. To be published, or to perish is the new ideology. To be seen in order to be eternalized.

191

Illustrative in this regard is that, in some graveyards in the capital city of our *Cam-Era*, Hollywood, the latest trend is to have a video of oneself in the gravestone, which visitors can play. During life-time, increasingly the producing, broadcasting and selling of oneself is also done virtually, via *spectacle*-media like You Tube, Broadcast Yourself, My Space, Hyves and Google Video, where you show personal webcam recordings, homemade videos and pictures of yourself and others. We have become marketeers of our own product, our face and image, merely to produce an identity of the self for ourselves and consuming Others. In doing so, our names, our faces, our reputation, our images all have become products that are consumed by others. Our identity has become prêt-à-porter, ready-made. But we do not only commodify our faces and images in a metaphorical sense, but increasingly we are also reshaping the image other people have of us. The industry of plastic surgery and 'make-over' entertainment TV is growing in size very rapidly. We do not only shop for clothes anymore, in order to improve the image and sell our identity to the Other, but increasingly we shop for piercings, tattoos, noses, boobs, hair, chins, small wastes as well.

And if we can't or are not willing to buy new body parts we do physical fitness to become socially fit. Never satisfied with the present, we endlessly seek for the ideal, the fantasy come true. We are constantly chasing ourselves to obtain the definitive and pure Self. Although we know that this is an endless desire, we nevertheless deny that it is a fantasy, or merely a ghost that we are chasing. And hence body-shopping has become normalized and accepted as a way to commodify your image and corpus. We become like the marketing that can be read on the products that we buy: New and Improved! My updated version 2.0. Hence, what we are doing is further blurring the distinction between production and consumption. The production and consumption of our images and bodies go hand in hand. We are both the master and the slave of our own commodification. Being seen and bought is our soma, our dope of today, according to what maybe is the most well-known re-constructed barcode human, or post-human, the musician Marilyn Manson: 'They love you when you're on all the covers. When you're not then they love another . . . We're all stars now in the dope show' (Marilyn Manson 1998, *The Dope Show*).

#### *Absence of the Controller*

The super-market society of mass consumption that we have created is a new world. But, in contrast to modernist brave new world of Huxley, the controller is now absent. The grand leaders who are promising us the freedom through equality and similarity and are showing us the right path of the future, be it a communistic, fascistic or Fordist-like future, have left the scene



and have been replaced by a hyper-individualistic and hyper-democratized globalizing world. As in a totalitarian Foucauldian move, we have internalized the hierarchical power by a system of mass democratization. Yet, and that is key, we as individuals have not taken their place either. Huxley's novel sought to warn the reader against the worrying trend of communifying totalities like communism and fascism, standardization and mass production, and to defend the individual rights and freedom. Paradoxically however, in our era of mass individualization in which personal freedom is the new God, we are not in control either. We have not become subjects of a master-controller promising us a tomorrow's world, but instead we have become subjects of ourselves.

We – as consumers – construct and reconstruct our identities by consuming goods, places, and others, and by producing, publishing and marketing our own names, images, faces and bodies. Our identities have become as dynamic as the goods, people and places. New goods are produced and displayed continuously for commercial reasons – to arouse our interests, to increase our spending and to extract value from the city. Places are also redeveloped over and over again to become and remain popular attractions. Like us, other people continuously stroll and gaze around cities to improve and change identities. It is these dynamics of consumption spaces that create personal uncertainty and unrest to keep up with new urban trends. The uncertainty and unrest is both created and exploited by consuming and producing others, which makes up the super-market society. We are produced by the super-market society as humans who feel an unceasing desire to consume goods, explore places, and observe other people. In fact, at the time of purchase, goods, travel destinations, home decorations or body-parts might no longer be 'hot' anymore, which makes the acquired identity old-fashioned. New goods are introduced and 'marketed' at an increasing pace. Cities we just consumed in a visual manner might become outmoded on the spot. Parts of cities are demolished and large-scale redevelopment projects in new architectural styles are added. The latter are designed as urban 'selling points.' Currently popular social groups we want to be part of may disappear into the background, formerly unpopular groups could become trendy and new sophisticated groups will arise. In our urge to belong to a certain group and to distinguish ourselves from other groups, it is our 'branded bodies' which are increasingly used in the super-market society to make and break the popularity of groups. All these urban developments reflect interplay of local and global dimensions. In some sense, we are locally-embedded shoppers – i.e. we usually shop at nearby consumption spaces and sometimes visit more distant places – but, at the same

time, we consume goods, places and people which increasingly reflect global trends. Globalization of urban economies implies an inexhaustible source for designing and implementing local changes of consumption spaces. In turn, this creates ever-changing and growing opportunities to adopt and transform personal identities. The consequence is that we are living in a brave new world that is a mass individualized society. In this new world it is not the equality, sameness and standardization, but difference, uniqueness and variation that matter. Every human believes s/he has become a king (Randy Newman 1974: Every Man a King), for he is a customer. We are free to choose and free to do what we want. And we choose to both produce and consume ourselves. The individualized advertisements, the homepage fetishism, the You-Tube and Google-Me tendencies, the body-shopping, the almost daily election polls, the many referenda, the unprecedented populism among our politicians all have created a hyper-sensitive societal arena in which every voice and vote of every individual has become important. We have become watchers of our moves, of our motives, of our selves. It is telling that the branches of marketing, commercial advisors, advertisers and beauty-shops take up the largest sectors in our economy now. And if we are not satisfied or we think our demands have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way, we turn to our legal advisors and lawyers, the other economic sectors of immense importance today, to satisfy our needs and desires in hindsight. These are the features of our present brave new world. We follow our own desires in order to become happy. Happiness has become the dominant goal to live for. That is our own fairy-tale, our utopia, our dreamland: To live happily ever after. And hence we shop, we shop till we drop, constantly seeking new pleasures, following new desires, consuming our selves. And if the world is not rendering us what we long for, or if we cannot bear the pace of the mindless consumption-race anymore, if we are in danger of falling of the high-speed track of consumerism, we take a Huxleyian 'soma' of our time, an anti-depressant like Prozac or Seroxat. While shopping for an identity, making a choice and buying a commodity also seem to have the effect of a temporary soma. It temporarily relieves us from the stressful urge to update our identity. For a short moment, we convince ourselves that the bought commodity is up-to-date and distinguishes us from the mass. However, we are well aware of the fact that new and better commodities are for sale – if only we tried a little harder to find them – or at least are in the making. This schizophrenic state of mind implies that we stop scanning the commodities on sale and other shoppers on parade for the time being. It therefore can give us some inner peace but this soon disappears when we are confronted with the

ever-changing range of commodities and consumer cults which we are eager to explore to improve ourselves once more.

### Escaping the Super-Market Society

So, where does this leave us as individuals if we are both subject as well as producers of our own desire? Interestingly, for Deleuze and Guattari, in sharp contrast to Jameson, the egolessness of the schizophrenic is not the core of the problem of capitalism, which 'replicates,' 'reproduces,' and 'reinforces' the logic of capitalism as it would be for Jameson (Jameson 1983), but the solution. The schizophrenic in their eyes is a radical, revolutionary, nomadic wanderer, who is freed from all beliefs, and who resists all forms of oppressive power. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari see schizophrenia as a central part of a subversive postmodern politics with the radical potential to bring down capitalism (Peretti 1996). Yet, arguing against Deleuze and Guattari here, we would argue that the emotions of the schizophrenic are not only joyful, but can also be fearful. The oppressive capitalistic system can be too overwhelming and cause anxiety. Although we do find the works of Deleuze and Guattari in this respect to be very inspiring and important, if not crucial works to understand the workings of today's capitalism and although they provide very useful insights in de-constructing and resisting the oppressive powers of today, we wish to believe that there would be other ways to unravel and escape from our disciplined selves than only through schizophrenia. For, to live in a routinized and systemized world as a schizophrenic person can be frightening and is hence not solving the gap, the lack between the society and the self. What remains therefore, is the lack, the fragmented self that in order not to become psychotic, needs some form of control over itself and its environment, some relief of the anxiety and fear that a totally fluid and ground-less society would imply. To this end, we do need, one would assume, some kind of control, some kind of balance between control and freedom. Yet, there is no contact anymore with a Ground, Grand Controller. The question then is what is the future of this brave new world if we have become both master and slave ourselves, if we are both our own God (Ford) and our own disciples? Maybe, to begin to understand the track of this endless journey, we should begin to ask: why do we pursue this rat race? Who are we fooling? Why do we not escape from this intoxicating and illusionary system of personal freedom and pursuit of personal happiness?

Can we, like John the Savage, who is confronted with the civilization of Huxley's brave new world break with the system and reclaim our right to be unhappy? The Savage in Huxley's novel commits suicide in the end of the novel, for he is detected by

the 'civilized world' and seen as exotic and new and hence as a new touristic attraction, subject of a new commercial entertainment.

Can we resist ourselves?

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