

**SCIENCE FICTION EPISODES
OF A SOCIETY FREE OF WORK**

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Synopsis

Science Fiction is a project in progress which presents different episodes that take place in a studio, an amusement park, a shopping mall and an office building. All of the episodes deal with the very conception of work and also of its obsolescence and the way in which it manifests itself in the city – centred around deconstructive trends in the very conception of work as a (nowadays unbelievable) rehabilitation of the Utopia of freedom obtained through work – as it has been known since the Enlightenment.

It is said that this Utopia emerged with the machine-like architecture of the 1960s, but it seems more likely that it arose out of a disciplinary, militaristic mentality. Now, in the so-called post-Fordism period, the architecture of our glossy shopping malls and leisure centres can be deliberately misinterpreted. A slight change of perspective – or a little ignorance regarding the basic safety standards – would permit a state of affairs in which the evolutionary trend in technology could come to represent the promise of rationalised work: not to create employment, but freedom from work. In fact, it seems that everything is ready: the shopping malls, the generously designed leisure areas, the small supermarkets with their climate of artificial oases – all that remains is to take care of a minute organisational detail, the redistribution of social wealth, in order to create logically a vision of intriguing reality.

All of the episodes were filmed between 1996 and 2001, with the collaboration of friends who were interested in this theme.

... TO EARN IT AGAIN, Berlin 1996

Camera: Martin Ebner

Actors: Martin Ebner, Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, Klaus Weber

Produced for UTV, a self-organised television project

DVD, colour, sound, 5'05"

Synopsis

The first episode takes place in a melancholy amusement park in Berlin. The park has a ghostlike air because there is no music or lights, not the slightest element of entertainment. We only hear the cries of the riders and the noises of the machines. It all makes us think, inevitably, of a factory. The text of this episode is taken from Friedrich Engels' report entitled *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. The quotation will continue to weave an absurd spiral of meanings that leads to "work," impotence and unawareness to a causal relationship.

Text

They used to carry us on their backs from here to there over the snow, and even then we used to work 16 hours. They would often kneel down to feed us as we stood by the machine: we didn't want to leave it and fall down in a faint.

And if we make a living by working, then we don't want to live, but simply to lose consciousness. Ah, and what we develop so that it will continue to exist prevents us from completely losing consciousness and demands one thing of us: impotence, precisely because this is the incomplete unconsciousness from which we always awake to regain it.

THE GENERALISATION OF NOT WORKING, Berlin 2000

Camera/editing: Martin Zawadsky

Actors: Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, Klaus Weber, Katja Eydel

DVD, colour, sound, 2'44"

Synopsis

The second episode takes place in a new shopping mall in East Berlin. It reproduces a scene from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* – except that now the madman with the lantern is not searching for God but looking for a job. His search is interspersed with reports in sabotage.

Text

In front of the shopping mall, a man with a placard: Looking for work.

VOICE OFF: In the Lordstown factory, equipped with the world's most modern and sophisticated conveyor belts, the management says that the workers have scratched the varnish, destroyed the windscreen and mirrors, slashed the seats, taken apart the indicator assemblies, thrown washers into the carburettor and broken the ignition keys.

They meet the man with the placard. The placard leans on the lamppost.

A sign on the lamppost says: Ne travaille jamais! (Never work!)

MAN AT THE REVOLVING DOOR OF THE SHOPPING CENTRE: Are you lost? Are you lost like a little child? Or are you hiding?

VOICE OFF: If you're a mechanic, you can stop a machine with dust or sand for two cents, and that way you hand your boss an expensive repair. If you work in a lace factory, you can cut the drive belts of the big machines with razor blades.

MAN AT THE FOUNTAIN IN THE SHOPPING CENTRE: We've killed it. How could we do that? How could we empty the sea?

VOICE OFF: They refused to go back to work and paid no attention to their union leader. They told him to clear off. The final assembly section decided to block all of the conveyor belts. They didn't send anyone home. They spent all night playing cards.

MAN WITH THE PLACARD IN FRONT OF THE ESCALATORS: Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we wandering aimlessly through an infinite nothingness?

EASY RIDER, Berlin 2000

Camera: Thomas Winkelkotte, Antje Schäfer

Editing: Angelika Levi

DVD, colour, sound, 4'50"

Synopsis

The third episode recreates a scene from *Easy Rider*.

Text

Nicholson, Fonda, Hopper by the bonfire.

NICHOLSON *talking to his motorcyclist's helmet*: Hey pal, never thought I'd see you again.

FONDA: You know somethin'? I gave it up a week ago.

Nicholson drinks whisky.

FONDA *rolls a joint*: Try this instead.

NICHOLSON: You mean marihuana?

FONDA: Yeah.

NICHOLSON: A'right, let's see.

HOPPER: What was that? What the hell was that, man? Hey, I was lookin' at this ... thing ... like the one we saw the other night, and it just went right across the sky, man ... I mean, it just changed direction and ... vanished, man.

FONDA: I dunno what you're talkin' about, man.

NICHOLSON: That was a UFO flashin' its lights. When we were in Mexico two weeks ago, we saw forty formations glidin' overhead. Now they're all over the planet. They've been comin' here since 1946, livin' and workin' among us. The government knows all about 'em.

HOPPER: What the hell are you sayin', man?

NICHOLSON: Well, they're people like us, from inside the solar system, except that they've got a highly evolved society. They have no wars, no monetary system, no bosses, because every one of 'em's a boss. What I mean is, thanks to their technology, they can provide themselves with food, clothin', shelter and transport with no effort at all.

FONDA: Wow!

HOPPER: Well what I say is, this is a small world: why don't they rebolt?

NICHOLSON: 'Cause if they did they'd cause outright panic. We'd still have bosses over us, and we'd just make 'em laugh if we let this information out. The bosses have decided to repress this information, 'cause it could cause one hell a shock to our old-fashioned system.

THE COLOUR THING, Vienna/Berlin 1999

Alice Creischer, Mona Hahn, Jane Heiss, Andreas Siekmann, Thomas Winkelkotte

Editing/sound: Karl Hoffmann

DVD, colour, sound, 4'18"

Synopsis

In the fourth episode, extraterrestrials land in the corridor of an office building, explore the mazelike carpeted structure and discover "human work gelatine" – a term Marx used to designate both wages and goods. But the extraterrestrials' diagnosis isn't entirely correct. "This seems to be getting complicated: capital is a semiotic operator." From the window of the building, the view moves towards the façade of a block of flats from which people are leaping out into mid-air.

Text

The text is read from back to front. Two voices that sound like astronauts landing:

1ST VOICE: Srotcudni yraropmet? (Temporary inductors?)

2ND VOICE: Detavitca! (Activated!)

1ST VOICE: Rotalupinam level ecnetsixe? (Existence level manipulator?)

2ND VOICE: Esu launam. (Manual use.)

1ST VOICE: Enoz laer-imes a. (A semi-real zone.)

2ND VOICE: Ereh kool, noitrencoc citsatnaf emas eht si sniamer that lla. Dehsiugnitxe neeb evah ot raepa smrof tneitnes lla. (All sentient forms appear to have been extinguished. All that remains is the same fantastic concretion, look here.)

2ND VOICE: ;Work! Secnereffid tuohtiw krow namuh fo etartnecnoc a, secnereffid tuohtiw tub, larulp eht ni, snigram eht ni noitallicso, suonitaleg. (Gelatinous, oscillation in the margins, in the plural, but without differences, a concentrate of human work without differences.)

1ST VOICE: Ygoloixa eht egnahc ot evah we. ecnatsbus lairtserretartni laicos eht fo etartnecnoc a sa dilav era yeht ... Work gelatine. (Work gelatine ... they are "valid" as a concentrate of the social intraterrestrial substance. We have to change the axiology.)

Keyboard, whistles like in a centrifuge phase.

2ND VOICE: Detacilpmoc gnitteg eb ot smeets siht. (This seems to be getting complicated.)

VOICE OFF: Capital is a semiotic operator.

Jane and Mona dancing on the precipice of a building.

JANE: There's nothing like a sweet pumping of the air.

MONA: I can't realise myself!

JANE *jumps*. As she falls: The merchandise has exerted its gravitation on the principle of uncertainty, as everything that remains, as it is everywhere, remains invisible.

THOMAS *jumps*: There's no turning back.

He falls and sings: Frankfurt, Brussels, Hong Kong, Manila, those who take decisions are there and they're never there.

MONA *falls*: Suddenly during the meal, while eating my sherbet, after the steak, I began to cough.

THE DIRECTORS, *from the window*: hhhhhhh.

MONA: But this society, when you arrive and say that you'll be invisible...

JANE: ...How and through whom, please? Data, please, proof, a report.

They disappear into a reflecting surface and turn into work gelatine.

THERE IS ALWAYS ONLY MORE, 2002

Camera: Antje Schäfer

'Making of' camera: Thomas Rieger

Editing: Viola Rusche

Narrators: Alice Creischer, Christiane Mennikes, Susanne Leeb, Viola Rusche

Assistant: John Dunn

DVD, colour, sound, 9'30"

Synopsis

The fifth episode takes us to the *Centro* in Oberhausen, one of Europe's largest commercial and leisure complexes. The *Centro* is often cited as an exemplary instance of the restructuring of heavy industry in the services and tourism sector. Here, the extraterrestrials must get the impression that the work-free society has been consummated. The film deals with this initial bedazzlement and the gradual disillusionment that follows.

Text

There is a character sitting on the escalators with a text balloon in his mouth like in the comics. It says: "Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we wandering aimlessly through an infinite nothingness?"

Another character slowly rides up the escalators with a placard. The placard says: Never work!

There is a detective standing in front of the Panorama complex of the Centro, gesticulating histrionically:

It is not only the orders of the financiers and their engineers that are established in a territory as transitional as the swallows. There are also the slag heaps of all the dreams of those who lived here before, driftwood, whose influencers can barely be controlled. And all of this despite the fact that our public relations departments make every effort to conceive those sediments as an emblem, whether it be of a nation, of history or of necessity and work.

A telephone rings. The detective takes his mobile phone out of his pocket, listens and replies:

Yes? Two? Observe first.

He walks in front of the sign indicating the S-Bahn station NEUE MITTE (New Centre) and speaks to the camera:

Now you see it: invasions can happen, like the case of the supposed extraterrestrials. For sure they're only lunatics.

The detective has reached the person with the speech balloon at the escalator. In this film it is a plasticine doll that from now on we will call Klaus. The detective takes Klaus's speech balloon and folds it in two. He speaks:

Of course, he's not wrong. In the present day, everything is clearly directed and in the stories of performance and consumption and their eternal, fast and numerous adventures...

He looks up, towards the dome of the passage.

...and all kinds of crisis are cleaned up with those stories as if they were fine powder.

He spots a second character with another speech balloon in her mouth, which says: There is always only more.

In this film, the character is called Katja. The detective takes Katia's speech balloon, folds it in two and puts in his pocket:

I suppose she has a certain arrogance towards the present. It's an arrogance that expresses itself in what we could call non-acceptance, only a resource.

Klaus and Katja in the lift. They look down at the landscape, at the people sitting on the benches of the island of flowers. They walk across the corridor.

KATJA: Finally the time has arrived. Work is finished. There are lots of people enjoying themselves here. And only in my head there's the factory siren, the sign-in clock, the factory card. They repeat and shape my wishes as if those wishes existed only in my workplace in working hours.

KLAUS: Here, you're only a body. The body is no longer an incidence, an issue, an ephemeral predicament; its link with me has become indissoluble. I can't shake it off any more. It reaches everywhere before I do and shines out and makes great claims.

KATJA: That's happiness. Happiness can only be felt, it can't be contemplated, because contemplation means deserting the body. That's why it's a job that's so difficult to want.

KLAUS: Remember those descriptions of the essence of the body: without conditions, without splits or dissensions, a present purely for itself: in the evening, to stroll around the old factory grounds and to want that and that and that once again without a trace of ego.

They take the escalator to the food section, called Oasis CocaCola.

KATJA: ...like a faithful shop assistant who does his job in the section that he wants and devours.

They eat and drink. We see the arm of the waiter who brings the food and drinks.

KLAUS: It seems that the machines' production work is carried out. There may be a minimum of working time that's distributed between them.

KATJA: Look, a different waiter.

KLAUS: It may be that each one has to work one or two hours a day.

Picture: Klaus and Katja in front of the video screen. In the picture there appears the waiter's arm with a drink.

The Oasis CocaCola video screen is showing a videoclip of Atomic Kitten. Singing: Kathie Lee, Liang Shi handbag factory, wage 13 cents, from 60 to 70 hours a week; Wal-Mart, Li Wen Factory, 18 cents an hour, 12-hour shifts; Ann Taylor, Kang Li Fashion Manufacturers, 13 cents an hour, from 7.30 to midnight; Ralph Lauren, Ellen Tracy, Linda Allard, Iris Fashions, 20 cents, 12 to 15-hour shifts; Esprit, You Li Fashion Factory, 13 cents an hour, from 7.30 to midnight; Cherokee Jeans, Meiming Garment Factory, 24 cents an hour, 70 hours a week; Nike and Adidas sports shoes, Yue Yuen Factory, 19 cents an hour, from 60 to 84 hours a week; Adidas Sportswear, Tung Tat Garment Factory, 22 cents, from 75 to 87 hours a week; Sears, Tianjin Beifang Factory, 24 cents, 60 hours a week.

Klaus and Katja go to the boutiques.

KLAUS: Remember that we've decided on total assimilation. So we're going to want something and we're going to get it, like a faithful shop assistant, in order to be sure of the beauty that surrounds us.

In the shop: Klaus dances, jumps and picks up a handkerchief.

You my only light, the lilacs and roses have no idea,
nothing that could resemble you in colour and brightness.

They walk towards another shop.

KATJA: I have the impression that all of the bodies are only a half.

KLAUS: And if the other half were not work but the people without value, which is determined by an index, a percentage of people who must be dispossessed, in order to continue constructing that beauty. And if afterwards you are still alive, then in a way you are living a statistical happiness.

In the next shop. Katja picks up a scarf and tries it on in front of the mirror.

KATJA: That's why we're so present, because remembering this relationship at every moment is unbearable

They go towards the exit.

KATJA: Now I remember. I saw the pale red boots of a cavalry officer. On examining them, I saw a piece of paper beside a puddle. I thought the officer would have trodden the paper into the mud with his heel, but...

They go through the electronic security control at the entrance and set off the alarm. They stand motionless for a moment. Katja continues the story:

...it didn't come up with a single step. I wanted to touch the paper, but I couldn't.

The detective hears the alarm from outside the Centro. He moves to arrest Katja and Klaus, who remain impassive. He shouts:

Stop, thief!

Neither of the two replies.

He insists: Are you bored? Don't you understand the story? It's convoluted and unpredictable. You're under arrest.

The detective takes them outside. Policemen appear. Katja finishes her story:

A kind of sweet nausea passed from the paper to my hand.