Arno Bammé

Reflecting on the papers published in our last three annuals, I am struck by how few of them are concerned with the interaction of work, technology and knowledge. Surely this is rather odd, given that we are currently facing a worldwide employment crisis on an alarming scale, the causes of which are to be found in the relationship between economics and technology? There can be no doubt that this question must be answered in the affirmative. Yet it would appear that other problems—meaning those that have been a concern of these annuals—are felt to be even more serious still. This is a sentiment I share only up to a point. At the next meeting of the college's advisory committee, I will therefore propose that its next annual address the subject of 'Work, Technology and Way of Life'—which ultimately boils down to the question of how society intends to use the creative resources to which the economics of technology are now giving rise—and not just locally, but the world over. What is lacking here are blueprints to serve as a basis for democratic debate and the necessary decision-making processes.

Just as science is opening up to society, so the everyday workings of society are becoming increasingly scientized. This does not have to mean that people are becoming more academic, but it does mean that the technical artefacts we implement are becoming more and more intelligent. In a society structured by technology, personal power is bound to be replaced by functional power and it is this that makes democratic controls all the more important. Technology, as the synthesis of science and engineering, reduces the amount of (remunerative) work required, while at the same time trivializing it and rendering it increasingly abstract. This in turn makes it possible for the work to be spread among an ever greater number of people so that each individual has to sacrifice less of his/her life to work. At the same time—and indeed because of this—, the battle over how the wealth generated by society should be distributed is now shifting from the level of production (the classical pay dispute) to that of the investment fund (political discourse).

How a society intends in future to deal both with the people who live in it and with the natural world surrounding it is projected in technology. Until now, the nature and direction of its development have been dictated largely by the quantitative and short-sighted interests of a profit-oriented economy. The need for qualitative, democratically legitimated decisions, however, is growing all the time. The involvement of large sections of the population is nevertheless tied to certain preconditions—to individual willingness and capacity, for example, to the existence of the relevant institutions and procedures, to the time available and financial security. Technology, as humanity's last grand narrative, is liberating our creative resources, while at the same time challenging us to adopt new modes of behaviour. Individual responsibility—including responsibility for what happens in society—is fast becoming greater than at any other point in history.

Scientific knowledge is playing an ever more influential role in almost all areas of daily life, just as our dependency on professions that 'deal' in and with knowledge is also on the increase. All knowledge-based professions, whether we call them experts, consultants or advisors, are becoming ever more essential to the theory and practice of contemporary society. Science and technology are transforming our social institutions beyond recognition. Work, education, politics, business, everyday life, our physical and cultural reproduction are all affected in equal measure. In public discourse, science has acquired a virtually incontestable monopoly as the only source of legitimacy for certain lines of argument. Despite widespread scepticism, the only serious solutions currently being offered to those-mainly environmental-problems that have been caused either directly or indirectly by science itself are all scientific solutions. Furthermore, the relevant literature by and large agrees that the ongoing development and inherent dynamism of the knowledge society will lead to fundamental changes in the way economic activity is structured. The key word here is 'post-industrial society'. The social importance of the economic system will decline. Economic activity will continue to carry considerable weight and its significance will certainly not be eliminated. But from the point of view of individuals, private households and other social groupings, economics is likely to become less important, the less dependent on economic activity they become. The main focus of each

9

individual's life is shifting away from what are first and foremost economic interests and towards other content. Only in a situation in which the primary concern is no longer the satisfaction of our existential needs can a social theory of a society based on 'fun', 'leisure' and 'adventure' be posited and understood. The shift that can be observed—at least from the point of view of social conflict—towards such generalized social discord as both Luhmann, in his system theory, and Habermas, in his theory of communicative action, seek to conceptualize also fits in with this scenario.

The advance of scientific knowledge into essential aspects of contemporary society has been variously described in the literature, including as (1) the permeation of all spheres of life and action by science (also referred to as 'scientization'), (2) the displacement of other forms of knowledge by science (also referred to as 'professionalization'), (3) the development of science as an unmediated force of production, (4) the emergence of a specific political remit (science, research and education policy), (5) the emergence of a new productive sector (the 'science industry'), (6) the transformation of power structures (the technocracy debate), (7) the dismantling of traditional hierarchies (codetermination and participation), (8) the shift in legitimacy from those with power to those with expert knowledge ('expert autonomy'). The development is nevertheless interpreted as contradictory. While the knowledge society makes it easier for individuals and smaller social groupings to emancipate themselves from the patronage of institutions and larger social collectives, the fact that knowledge is gaining in social importance does not of itself lead to greater equality and a more equitable distribution of wealth. On the contrary, new, knowledge-based forms of social inequality can emerge and even become institutionalized. They may even reinforce existing inequalities and give rise to new privileges. That economic growth in future is bound to go hand in hand with the loss of full employment is one of the most salient characteristics of an economic system in which knowledge is fast becoming the most important source of social wealtha system that increases production, while at the same time reducing the amount of work invested in it.

There can be no doubt that society's material bases and the dynamism with which these are developing together form the engine that is driving the expansion of science and technology, of education and personal competence.

They are creating scope for redistribution. They are laying the groundwork for a social safety net, which in turn has the potential to reduce both economic uncertainty and our direct dependency on market forces. Both form the material basis of political participation. Both are triggering cultural changes on a number of different levels—changes that are causing traditional interrelationships and networks to unravel. In doing so, however, they are not only creating new problems, conflicts and risks, but are also exhausting the problem-solving potential of those traditional forms of organization and value systems with which society has hitherto tackled the problems confronting it.

Although, or even because, our knowledge of nature and of society is 'growing', the knowledge society is becoming increasingly fragile. One of the fundamental attributes of knowledge is that it can never be absolute. That scientific knowledge is no longer deemed a true and objective measure or an undisputed source of authority is therefore only logical. What really makes scientific-and technical-knowledge so special is rather the way in which this type of knowledge, more than any other, constitutes ever more far-reaching opportunities for action. The scope for creativity to which scientific knowledge gives rise is expanding and changing all the time. It has become both the basis and the engine of social change too. The ever more radical transformation of social ties and value systems and ever greater social contingency are only the most conspicuous-the 'postmodern'-symptoms of this change. That the spread of scientific knowledge is not only resulting in both more and more varied opportunities for and conditions of human action, but on the level of social discourse is at the same time provoking intelligent resistance to both science itself and to the introduction of technical artefacts is therefore not surprising. There can be no doubt that science and technology are giving rise to new forms of action, while eliminating others altogether. It follows that they are both multiplying and intensifying the opportunities for resistance to the developments they themselves have initiated. This means that for an ever growing number of actors, they are creating opportunities for precisely those types of action that are likely to support and enhance resistance to the technologically induced generalization and homogenization of social behaviour in the postmodern

knowledge society. In other words, science and technology (or 'technoscience') have the potential not only to limit choice, make control more efficient and create risks (of course—that too! Hence the term, the 'risk society')—while at the same time cementing the existing balance of power and existing inequalities—, but can also broaden the scope and multiply the number of counterstrategies we can adopt. Social action is becoming increasingly flexible. Our ability to influence the powers that be (whoever that may be), to demystify authority, to increase the number of people and groups who can avail themselves of the resources science and technology provide—all of these things are on the increase. And it is this, paradoxical as it may sound, that is lending the knowledge society both its inherent 'strength' and its insecurity and fragility.

Scientific knowledge is at the heart of the knowledge society debate, which is why the talk is sometimes of a 'science society' too. Scientific knowledge is based on a real, verifiable knowledge of the world. This is where it differs, at least when measured by its own standards, from magical knowledge, esoteric knowledge and from all types of opinion and faith. This is common knowledge, yet it is only half the truth. For of all the many theories science offers, there is only one type of theory that instead of merely contemplating the world, actually seeks to make it palpable. To put knowledge into practice-this is its purpose, as also its aim. A theory that is concerned with knowledge for its own sake may be falsified and abandoned sooner or later, whereas an aircraft built on the principles of aerodynamics, to mention but one example, must be able to fly. This type of theory is commonly referred to as 'operational'. The operationality imperative is characteristic of the way in which theorizing has developed in the West. Operational theories, and this is another significant aspect of them, manifest themselves in both space and time as technology, the term 'technology' in this case being used in its broadest sense to mean the synthesis of science and engineering, a specific social project which, having begun in Europe, has since taken hold worldwide. Technology is the means by which we interact with nature-both that inside us and that surrounding us-in a way that is to our advantage. What technology boils down to ultimately is power-methodical, scientific, premeditated and manipulative power. As I have already posited, technology

is a projection of what society and the interests dominating it intend to do with both people and things. Far from being imposed on it as an afterthought from without, the motives and interests it is to serve are rather a constituent part of its construction.

Man controls his metabolic relationship with nature with the aid of tools first, then engineering and finally technology. At the end of this development, nature and society are so enmeshed that they can scarcely be distinguished from each other. As Maurice Godelier, the French social philosopher once pointed out, history is increasingly reflected in nature. While in bourgeois society, it used to be economics that functioned as the regulator or mechanism that lent history its purpose and coherence, this function appears to have passed to technology. And the science underlying technology is the only important social activity which, as one North American social philosopher has suggested, is both cumulative and linear-independent of its consequences for human happiness. It is technology that is creating a shared horizon for economic productivity and turning the utopia of the limitless accumulation of wealth into a realistic possibility. This process has of necessity led to a homogenization of all human societies-at least in their fundamentals-irrespective of their historical origins or cultural heritage. All those countries that are undergoing this transformational process are of necessity becoming more and more alike. Traditional social organizations such as tribes, religious communities or families are being robbed of their original substance and replaced by more 'rational' organizations resting on the principles of functionality and efficiency. Viewed in this way, technology can indeed be described as the last of the 'grand narratives'.

As I have already said, it used to be economics that had this unifying, civilizing function. Technology's displacement of this socially synthesizing principle of integration has found its way into some of the social theories posited just recently, whether under headings such as 'Technological Formation', 'Age of Technology', 'Technological Civilization', 'Technoscientific Civilization' or, if the theory is concerned more with the underlying technology, 'The Information Society' and such like. Both economics and technology, as mechanisms of social synthesis, differ significantly in one central point. Economics abstracts from qualities and content. It is

concerned above all with profit and added value. What counts is quantitythe bottom line of the ledger, as it were. Economics in bourgeois society is generally called the free market economy. The market, as a social authority and societizing principle, may mediate between isolated individuals, but it does not interfere with the physical properties, with the material substance of that upon which it is based, meaning the goods it circulates. It changes only the ownership and availability of the same. Man's relationship with nature, his metabolic interaction with the natural world, is not affected. The changes take place either beforehand, in production, or afterwards, in consumption. The market abstracts from natural interrelationships. It is a 'purely social' relationship, a social construct in the truest sense of the word. Technology, on the other hand, impacts directly on man's interaction with both internal and external nature. It modifies physical form and changes material properties. Decisions therefore have to be made on the level of quality and substance. In social discourse, this can happen only by exchanging arguments of substance. Until now, however, such decisions have been left largely up to the autopoietic market, which invariably chose to make whatever promised the largest profits.

Profit, the economic gain and prime mover of the bourgeois economy, is generated in the productive sphere. The sphere of circulation, meaning the market, is responsible only for its realization. As has already been said, the market is abstracted from the natural interrelationships upon which this is based. Its influence on production is only indirect, but nevertheless critical, given that it is on the market that the goods made in the productive sphere must live up to what they promise-in other words turn a profit. According to the literature on this subject, this was the mechanism in place until around 1870 and it continued to apply even after that-albeit with greatly curtailed influence-right up to 1950. Since then, however, technology, which has to meet very different demands from those of the market, has gained in terms of both weight and dynamism in the productive sphere and is coming to influence investment decisions and future projects to an ever greater degree. On the side of nature, meanwhile, which is also the material side, the sheer depth and scope of the technologies now being applied are causing utilitarian production to move beyond those possibilities that can be expressed only

in quantitative terms—and which in most cases are in any case geared to short-term utilization. The more technologized our world becomes, the more society's investment decisions are having to be made on the basis of political factors rather than the market. That such decisions are politically motivated does not automatically make them either democratic or wise. Assuming decisions affecting the future are no longer made on the basis of economic mechanisms—whether alone or indeed at all—, then the question now must be how such decisions should be made, according to which rules and by which social authority? To answer these questions, we first need a fundamental redefinition of what is meant by 'political'.

Adducing technology to account for the world's homogeneity is actually no more plausible than the diametrically opposed theory of postmodernism. One of the central tenets of postmodernist thinking is that one and the same situation can be interpreted completely differently, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. One point of view cannot, therefore, be any more right or wrong than another. The only thing that can be said of it with any certainty is that it is *different*. Radical plurality, in its fundamental recognition of different forms of knowledge, different ways of life, different worldviews and different patterns of behaviour, is the salient characteristic of all postmodernist thinking. There is no homogeneity, only heterogeneity. Which is why postmodernism comes down so overwhelmingly in favour of democracy, individual rights and difference.

With just a few exceptions, most postmodernist theorizing argues that the demise of the grand narratives has less to do with the transformation of society's institutions and interrelationships than with the transformation of contemporary culture. The world of ideas, science and politics is being deconstructed, whereby deconstruction must be understood as a dualistic movement comprising both 'negative' criticism and 'positive' construction. The work, however, is done primarily on the text and less on the reality produced by economics and engineering. The causes of the grand narratives' loss of legitimacy are sought first and foremost in the 20th century history of ideas. Any discussion of postmodernism is thus likely to appear self-exemplifying, for both the phenomena it describes, and its analysis of these phenomena lack any socio-historical specificity. This gives rise

to more questions than answers: Are postmodernist phenomena ultimately just an expression of the economic logic of late capitalism? Or are we talking here about a new phase of societization in the application of science and engineering? Are these phenomena the result of a breach in our cultural and social dynamism? The following paradox is also conceivable: While the success of modernist thought correlated with Europe's worldwide hegemony and its rather crude form of colonialism, its postmodernist deconstruction has brought about the gradual dissolution of this crude hegemony as a direct consequence of the global dissemination of the social structure upon which it was based. Expressed in Marxist terms: The cultural superstructure can relax now that the substructure upon which it is based has taken hold worldwide. In Europe, North America and elsewhere in the world, people have for centuries been trying to liberate both Western science and its logical underpinning from the constraints of time and place. Their successes have been celebrated as man's emancipation and liberation from both secular and sacred ties. Yet this success has had numerous unforeseen consequences too. Among the unintended consequences of the search for a mathesis universalis and with it an end to all dissent has been the exact opposite-namely the emergence of a radical plurality of views and opinions. This radical plurality, which is postmodernism's central theme, has paradoxically been accompanied by a convergence of ways of life, especially in economics and technology, both within and between each culture. Time and place have lost much of their old relevance to production and cultural practice and the disillusionment to which this has given rise is reflected in postmodernist thought. This is undoubtedly where the merits and significance of postmodernist thought reside. While it bears a direct relation to the structures of knowledge-induced inequality, it bears none at all to the materially induced structures of inequality. It was this missing link with the socio-economic stratification of society that led to Stehr's apposite description of postmodernism as 'a consciousness alienated from modernism'. According to Stehr, this consciousness has its origins neither in society's self-sufficient cultural development nor in the heroic endeavours of its intellectual precursors. When searching for the social roots of postmodernism, which he believes to reside above all in the changed economic structure of (post)modern society, Stehr cites

two factors of importance-namely the dwindling economic significance of 'labour' and 'property' as the traditional productive forces of contemporary industrial society, on the one hand, and the simultaneous decline in the importance of the nation state as an influential and effective economic actor, on the other. Viewed in this way, postmodernism can be said to mark the collapse of an economic system (capitalism) that was at least in a position to influence and indeed dominate the cultural life of society. The disjunction between the culture of a society, on the one hand, and its structure, on the other, makes it possible for separate ways of life to develop that are subject neither to the direct influence of economics, nor to such traditional cultural practices as the protestant work ethic or puritan morality. It is these divergent ways of life that form the social basis of postmodernist interpretation. While they should not be viewed as the end of the age of ideology, they nevertheless point to a society in which the cement of social solidarity is lacking-in other words, to a society that is anything but free of friction and violent conflict. The living spaces thus created are inhabited not just by the traditional cultural elites, but by countless other actors as well. Postmodern mass culture develops new sensibilities such as spontaneity, sensation and immediacy. It propagates constant regeneration and is characteristic of a pluralistic society in that it requires countless irreconcilable worldviews and orientations to compete with one another. At first glance, it constitutes a latently destructive process that not only endangers social cohesion, but also casts doubt on the underlying social structure. Critics of postmodernism have therefore repeatedly complained of its inability to account for social and political action, of its failure to provide the moral guidelines that would enable us to exploit the greater potential for action created by the development of a postmodern social structure. Only by finding the middle ground between all those extreme, and in most cases asymmetrical, dichotomies such as 'rationalism versus relativism', 'universalism versus particularism', 'global versus local', 'transcendentalism versus contextualism', therefore, can we avoid becoming ensnared in a logical-and artificial-vacuum when discussing the critical characteristics of postmodern society. Only then can we refer directly to its socio-historical reality and reflect on the critical changes that have taken place in how

society is constituted. Indeed, the plurality propagated by postmodernist social and scientific criticism has not only brought us greater freedom, but has also given rise to numerous problems of both a theoretical and a practical nature. For how is a (global) society that neither ignores the true extent of actual difference nor is willing to abandon its communicative engagement—that being a precondition for all societization—supposed to function? If everything in postmodern society is self-referential and autopoietic, then this must apply to criticism too, whatever its particular interest may be in a given situation. In which case there can no longer be any privileged havens of critical reflection. If, paradoxically, the cement that binds society together is its heterogeneity, then criticism itself can be possible only as a notoriously contradictory form of communication, without any sure ground to support it. Because for every interest-the interest in self-restraint in biotechnology, for example-there is bound to be an equally well-founded counter-interest. And because the postmodern selfimage no longer allows for any privileged haven of critical reflection on society as a whole—a haven that of necessity would have to be outside that same society-, and because uniform and binding standards are no longer possible, all criticism must come from within and hence, by its very nature, must be local and provisional. And this is where it becomes complicated.

Postmodernism's farewell to the 'grand narratives', at least to those relating to philosophy, theology and other theoretical worldviews, is of course eminently understandable. In a global society still in the making that brings together a large number of highly heterogeneous cultures, a shared worldview is scarcely possible—at least not without the use of brute force. Logical as this is, it does not have to mean that *every* 'grand narrative' is now at an end. Other interpretations are possible too. After all, the very fact that something akin to a global society is evolving at all, despite postmodernist arbitrariness, can no longer be denied and it could also be argued that this process has its roots in technology. This is the basis upon which a postmodernist superstructure can be erected—in all its colourful and confusing heterogeneity. This is the bond—the all-embracing, unifying bond that makes possible all those 'small narratives', without which society would degenerate into chaos. In other words, global unity is a product of neither philosophy nor religion, but rather—and this is

where postmodernist thinkers are undoubtedly in the right—of something much more profane, namely of technology and of the Western principles of logic underlying it. Viewing the matter in this way means viewing the narrative approach of technological formation and postmodernism as two sides of the same coin, both of which promise truth—albeit from different perspectives.

Assuming that technology really is replacing economics as the force that synthesizes society, then this has two serious implications. The first of these is that work as we know it, meaning by and large heteronomous, remunerative employment, will be reduced to the minimum. Economic growth generated by automation and ever more intelligent machines does not create new jobs. On the contrary, it destroys them. Remunerative work, therefore, will cease to be the source of all wealth. This in turn means that in economic terms, people will become largely superfluous. If, on the other hand, work becomes just an insecure job, then obviously, this can no longer be taken seriously and can no longer serve as a source of identity, meaning and power. While working hours and employment could be artificially maintained at existing levels by adopting a form of production whose sole purpose is job creation, once society starts producing in order to work, instead of working in order to produce, then work itself becomes pointless. Its primary purpose then would be to 'occupy people' in order to perpetuate the existing hierarchical, disciplinary and competitive structures upon which bourgeois society is based. Instead of telling people they will be able to work less in future, the message now is that 'work is becoming scarce'. Instead of celebrating the prospect of more leisure time, the message now is that 'there will be fewer jobs to go round'. Society has reached a stage in which the official line is not that work creates products, but rather that production creates work. People no longer work in order to produce, but rather produce in order to work. 'Work' these days actually means any remunerative activity. The terms 'work' and 'employment' have become synonymous. People are often hired simply so that they are 'employed' and the unemployment rate falls. The reality is that society no longer needs them-neither in the factory nor in the office. Work is no longer something that one does, but rather something that one has. Which is why most people, both those

who are looking for work and those who 'have' it, view work as nothing more than the sale of their time, the point of which is irrelevant. People no longer work in order to make cars or ships, but rather are employed 'at VW' or 'at Howaldt'. And whether a job is good or bad depends first and foremost on the income—the type of work and working conditions being only secondary. Work of all kinds is therefore in danger of becoming a pointless compulsion, the purpose of which in the prevailing system is to disguise from people the fact that they are unemployed and economically superfluous. This in turn effectively prevents their emancipation from work (or at least such work as is imposed on them from without) and so conceals the arbitrary nature of those social relationships that determine income and the circulation of wealth. Yet for more and more people these days, 'real life' actually begins outside the world of work, this being what is at the heart of Schulze's theory of the 'experiential society'.

Although technology creates more leisure time by minimizing the sphere of heteronomous work, the political strategy is not, as a rule, to find ways of putting this time to good use in the interests of society as a whole, but rather to slow down or even reverse the historical process of minimization. This, however, is an illusion. While it may be possible, at least in the short term, to keep heteronomous work alive artificially, despite its de facto marginalization, it will not be possible to invest that work with meaning. For those who are not engaged in pioneering research, who are not craftsmen or who do not practice a specific profession, identifying with their work will become increasingly difficult. Reversing the alienation and trivialization of heteronomous work, however, is impossible. Unless, of course, we revert to the village economy, which is equally impossible. The same applies to the old socialist view that the course of history should be reversed (at least in social, economic and technological fields) in order to create qualified jobs for everyone. This in turn would enable autonomous groups of workers to regain control of production and products, while at the same time being able to fulfil themselves as individuals. The more the production process becomes societized, the less personal and autonomous work becomes. Societization inevitably means a division of labour, the 'normalization' and standardization of tools, processes, jobs and knowledge. Even such trivial things as telephones, video recorders and microprocessors

can no longer be made by autonomous work within a family, a group or community. The societization of production has of necessity led to a situation in which microprocessors, ball bearings, sheet metal and fuel are all interchangeable, irrespective of their provenance. This means that the work invested in them, no less than the machines used to make them, is also interchangeable. And interchangeability, to paraphrasealbeit somewhat critically-the old socialist utopia, is vital if, as is desirable, the individual's working hours are to be reduced so that what little work is available can be spread among the entire working population. This, however, will be possible only if the complex knowledge required to this end is integrated in the technological production processes themselves and stored in the machines and systems so that the qualifications essential to every type of work can be acquired relatively fast. Only by rendering most socially necessary, but heteronomous work banal can it be spread throughout the working population and each individual's working hours reduced to just a few hours each day.

Such a scaling down of heteronomous production would inevitably lead to an expansion of the autonomous sphere. In other words, the smaller the heteronomous sphere with its socially predetermined and relatively anonymous jobs became, the more autonomy each individual would have. These two spheres would interact: The scope for individual creativity and social activity available in the autonomous sphere would make individuals more resistant to a depersonalized and hierarchical division of labour. On the other hand, the socially predetermined work in the heteronomous sphere would protect individuals against the pressures and tensions of an excessively integrated community, such as the family or other social units. No one can be creative and full of empathy 12 hours a day, 300 days a year. Alternating between activities that demand intensive involvement and such as do not make demands of either the emotions or the intellect could become a source of mental equilibrium and personal fulfilment. The existence of banal work in the social sector would provide each individual with time out from the constraints of the community, while at the same time preventing the community from drifting off into autarchy and selfsufficiency. André Gorz, who authored the concept of the dualistic society, is concerned above all else with expanding the field of autonomous,

non-commercial, individually ordained activity by facilitating self-production and self-tuition. According to Gorz, mutual assistance, cooperation and the shared use of supportive facilities will replace some of those services which at present are provided either by private enterprises or by bureaucratic authorities. Yet even this is too conservative. In future, it will not only be necessary, but also possible, assuming the provision of an individual allowance, to involve ordinary people in society's political decision-making processes to an extent going far beyond that hitherto possible. And because there will be no place in society that can claim exclusive rights as the place in which all decisions on society's future are to be made, problems will have to be solved wherever they arise. The political institutions and processes will therefore have to be as numerous as they are varied. Work that is socially necessary will be done less and less behind factory walls, i.e. in the traditional centres of production, and become more and more an integral part of public life-through grassroots initiatives and NGOs, for example. And even if such work is non-remunerative, it will still have to be professional.

The second serious implication is this: People who no longer 'have' work will still have to be furnished with purchasing power. Once remunerative work's contribution to society's wealth goes into decline, it can no longer serve as the yardstick by which this wealth is measured. The goods to be distributed will still have a 'price', but will no longer have a 'value' (for the purposes of traditional economic theory). If products manufactured with minimal human labour are to be purchased, then the people who are to purchase them will first have to be furnished with a means of payment. This means of payment, however, will no longer bear any relation to the traditional cost of labour. In other words, the link between income and remunerative work will have been severed once and for all.

The products produced will still have a price, but to say they have a value ultimately based on the work invested in them will no longer make sense. A society that is in the process of technologizing its production of goods can no longer solve the distribution problem by applying the principle of equivalent value. That the goods should still cost something—however the price may be calculated—nevertheless stands to reason, as companies will still have to budget, natural resources will still be scarce

and hence have to be used sparingly and innovation will still have to be rewarded. But because no one will be working, products that come at a price will have to be purchased by people without any real purchasing power, meaning people without drawing rights based on the work they themselves have put in and expressed in terms of money. These people cannot be allowed to 'starve', however, and so will have to be furnished with money even without having to work for it. Redistributing the wealth generated by society will cease to be a purely economic problem, therefore, and will become a political problem as well. Not only that, but the redistribution conflict will shift from the productive sphere to the financial sphere. Companies will continue to do business on the market and will still strive for a good return on investment. Competition between them will force them to be innovative as well. The prices their products fetch on the market, however, will be nominal and no longer represent a labour equivalent. In future, it will be up to investment funds and their managers to ensure that companies continue to earn well and it is here, far removed from the factory floor and subject to very different imperatives, that the real profits will be made.

The financial resources thus created could then be used to provide those who no longer 'have' work with purchasing power, access to which would have to be codified as a basic right. As the amounts due and modes of distribution would have to be determined at the political level, the battle for influence over the redistribution process would leave the factory floor and move to the head offices of investment funds, this being the place where capital was actually accumulated. Instead of pay disputes, there would be social discourse and disputes over the exact amount of the individual allowance. While the economics of time and sparing use of resources would still affect the material dimension of production, inasmuch as they are both concerned with society's interaction with the natural world, and while innovation would still have to pay off, none of this would have any bearing on the criteria according to which society distributed the wealth it had generated.

The *economic* problem of *added value* will be superseded by the *political* problem of *wealth distribution*. What this will mean in practice is consciously deciding how the wealth produced by society should be distributed once

work has lost its significance as a measure of individual performance, i.e. once the equation of work and greater prosperity is no longer a given. One conceivable option, for example, would be to introduce a legal claim to a base income, which would entitle every person to a share in the collective wealth of society. A person's income would then be made up of two components-one an egalitarian allowance distributed by the state and the other, an individual and variable income earned on the market. The base income could be financed from two sources-partly from the state's tax revenues, which would no longer have to be spent on subsidies and social security benefits, and partly from the assets managed by investment funds, some of which would be created by the 'caymanization' of corporate earnings, meaning their transfer to so-called tax havens in order to evade tax at home. But no matter what form the political solution takes, it is clear even now that the distribution conflicts of the future will take place at investment fund level, rather than at the productive level. And because fewer and fewer people will be in work, the traditional places of production will cease to be society's decision-making centres, just as they will cease to be the scene of those social conflicts that are bound to arise over how society's wealth is distributed.

If, in the not too distant future, there really are no more production problems, but rather only distribution problems, then we really will be faced with a fundamentally different society. Economic calculations, political programmes, social doctrines-all the usual decision-making criteria, all those things that have hitherto provided society with its intellectual frame of reference, will no longer be up to the job of describing a world that is moving further and further away from traditional givens. The postmodern challenge is that of 'uncertainty'. Instead of predictions and forecasts, these days there are only questions. No one has a credible overall concept of how the society of the future will look. There is no messianic theory to lend cohesion and continuity to collective action. Instead, all we have now is a colourful array of activities, none of which has any recognizable subject. Instead of social cohesion, all we have now is an indefinite number of chameleon-like individuals, whose most important project is not to seize power with the aim of creating a new and better world, but only to retrieve the power of the individual to shape his or

her own life. Society is breaking up into numerous, highly mobile groupings. It is becoming the scene of countless, decentralized, articulate and inarticulate conflicts that defy any unifying analysis. When Margaret Thatcher justified her policies with the words 'There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families', she may have sounded cynical at the time, but she certainly had a point.

There is no longer any point in wondering where humanity is going or in clinging on to the immanent laws of historical development. Humanity is not going anywhere and history does not of itself create meaning. We have nothing to hope from history, but nor do we owe it anything either. The point is no longer to commit ourselves to some transcendental project that will redeem us from suffering. On the contrary, the task these days is to establish what we want, to allow plurality to develop and to decide which direction we should take. Humanity's future no longer depends on a vision or revolution, but rather on a project as yet to be defined and on the capacity of society to organize itself in such a way that it can see this project through to completion. Those liberated from heteronomous work are not a monolithic social subject. They do not possess any transcendental unity or mission and have no overriding concept of history or society. They know neither religion nor god, so to speak, and have no reality beyond themselves. They are not proclaiming the integration and redemption of the individual, but rather are being forced, by their very autonomy, to decide for themselves who they are and to define a society that is compatible both with their autonomous existence and with their projects. This society will derive its dynamism from its uncertainty and volatility. The technology that is making us increasingly interconnected throughout the world is at the same time giving rise to a colourful and chaotic postmodern culture, in which it is the individual that is elevated to the status of the highest good (resulting in a 'pluriversum' of countless individuals). A society that provides so much scope for autonomy can only develop and survive if the individuals in it are prepared to invent and define their own sovereignty and their own interrelationships. Freedom can never be decreed from above by an institutional power. Freedom can only ever be claimed and practised by individuals themselves. By rendering remunerative work all but superfluous,

technology, or—to use traditional terminology—society's productive forces, have created the preconditions for this development. Technology, I once said, is a socio-historical project. It is the tool society uses to project the futures it wants and to preclude those it does not want. Unlike economics, decisions affecting the development of technology are decisions of a substantial, qualitative nature. If we are to prevent these decisions being made on the basis of the short-term profit motive, then we must ensure they are made at the political level and that they are preceded by extensive public discourse. To be able to achieve this, however, we must first implement the institutions and procedures we need to facilitate democratic participation.

Here I would like to thank the European Union, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Styrian Government and the City of Graz. Their generosity makes the IAS-STS possible. And especially I would like to thank these colleagues of IFZ (Inter-University Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture) who make the IAS-STS run: Günter Getzinger, Managing Director of IAS-STS, Bernhard Wieser, Executive Manager of the Scientific Advisory Board, Sieghard Lettner, responsible for information and communication technology infrastructure and Reinhard Wächter, responsible for the office of IAS-STS. And I would like to thank my colleagues of the Scientific Advisory Board: Prof. Hartmut Kahlert from Graz University of Technology, Prof. Elisabeth List from Karl-Franzens University in Graz and Harald Rohracher from IFZ.

Prof. Arno Bammé

Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies on Science, Technology and Society (IAS-STS) Graz, June 2004