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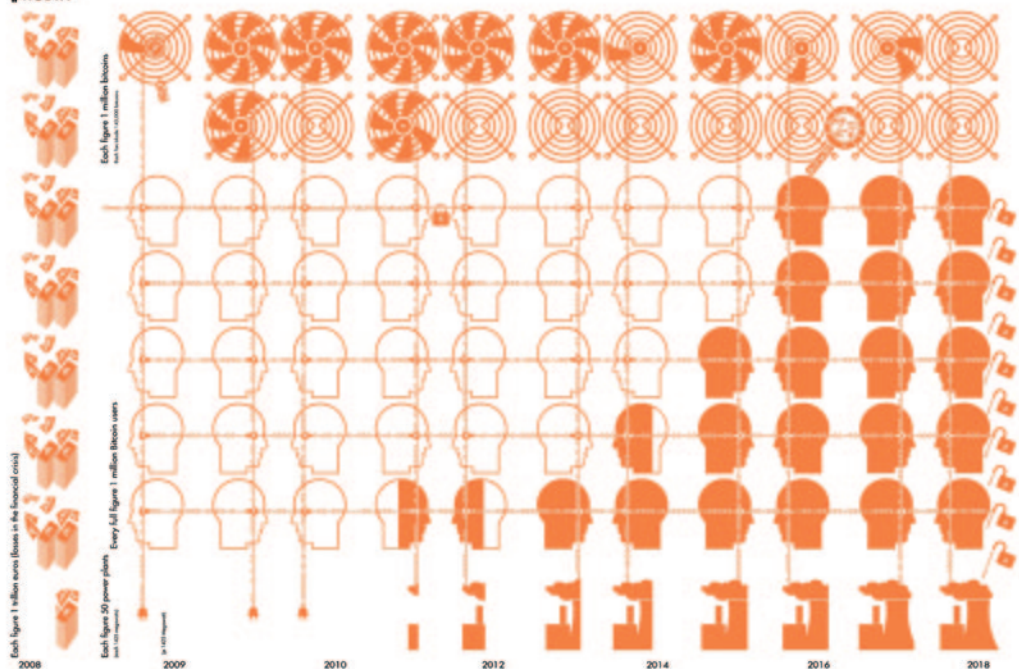
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Bitcoin



Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann. *Updating Page 62/Bitcoin*, 2019. From the ongoing series (since 2003) updating Otto Neurath, ed., *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft: Bildstatistisches Elementarwerk* (1930).

Plan and Council: Genealogies of Calculation, Organization, and Transvaluation

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The era of digital platforms and Big Data has triggered the return of the so-called Socialist Calculation Debate. This series of exchanges from the 1920s to the 1940s on economic planning and pricing pitted Austrian School economists such as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich August von Hayek—founding figures of neoliberalism—against socialists such as Oskar Lange, Maurice Dobb, and Otto Neurath. To a greater or lesser extent, the socialist protagonists in the debate had come to adopt and adapt tenets of neoclassical economics and its emphasis on supply and demand as the determining factors of price.¹ In the process, they either rejected or qualified Karl Marx’s version of classical political economy, with its emphasis on socially necessary labor as the substance of value.²

Key leftist participants in the socialist calculation debate considered neoclassical economics to be a more universal model than Marxian political economy, which is ultimately a critical theory of the capitalist economy; this is precisely what made drawing up the outlines of a postcapitalist economy such a challenge for Marxists. For proponents of socialization and planning such as Lange and Neurath, it was neoclassical economics that had relevance beyond capitalism. If economics is all about balancing supply and demand, then “the beautiful systems of economic equilibrium described by Böhm-Bawerk, Wieser, Marshall, and Cassel are not descriptions of society as it is, but prophetic visions of a socialist economy of the future.”³ Socialism’s task was to make economic reality approximate neoclassical models through centralized planning, which could do the job better than the anarchy of the “free market.”

In recent years, these exchanges have met with new scholarly and theoretical interest. As the collective imaginary is increasingly dominated by scenarios of ecological and social collapse, the question of a rational *Gestaltung* of life has staged a comeback. While the critical economists and theorists who instigated the current “Socialist Calculation Debate 2.0” do not necessarily subscribe to all the fundamental economic tenets held by their left-wing forebears, they do argue



that contemporary technology makes economic planning far more viable than it was for much of the twentieth century—offering forms of real-time calculation that open up new possibilities for planning beyond rigid five-year plans.⁴ In engaging with these arguments, I trace genealogies of political theory and activism as well as artistic practices that have sought to challenge and problematize dominant—neoclassical and neoliberal—economic imaginaries. My contention is that the calculation debate was haunted by an *organization debate* in which the top-down central plan had the self-organized workers’ council as its dialectical counterpart.

Workers’ and soldiers’ councils had become a crucial organizational form in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and then again in 1917. Time and again, for certain factions of the Left, the council seemed like the social form of the future partly because it countered the reduction of political agency to the casting of a vote for this or that party, with its bureaucracy and hierarchy; instead, it promised a politics of active involvement and social immediacy. I reintroduce the concept and the history of the council into the debate on economic planning not as a magical solution but as part of a critical constellation of theories and practices that amount to a series of propositions for transforming value—for transvaluing it—and for alternative forms of collaboration and coexistence. In the process, forms of representation and visualization will be shown to be an integral part of debates about calculation and organization. Imagining the economy otherwise also requires other ways of imaging.

Postwar Planning: Survivals and Prefigurations

The figure of Hayek looms large over today’s Calculation Debate 2.0. One of the founding figures of neoliberalism, Hayek is widely considered to be the winner of the historical debate, with his 1945 essay “The Use of Knowledge in Society” being particularly significant and influential.⁵ Hayek took the calculation debate to be about price and/as *information*. Evgeny Morozov, one of the protagonists of the Calculation Debate 2.0, foregrounds a peculiar feature of Hayek’s emphasis on the information conveyed—or the knowledge provided—by prices.⁶ What is

significant is their minimal nature; they leave out much more than they convey. Prices derive their agency and force from a calculated impoverishment. In the terms of communications science, they focus on a bare-bones message and reduce everything else to noise that is to be eliminated.

Morozov argues that, “as long as one economic actor discovers a set of facts that changes their evaluation of a commodity, the effects of that revaluation propagate throughout the system—driving the commodity’s price up or down—without anyone else needing to know what the new facts actually are.”⁷ Much like “an aerial snapshot of an ongoing military battle,” the price system thus conveys only the “current positions—many of them based on erroneous perceptions of the present and the future—of all economic actors with regard to one another.”⁸ The price system works because capitalism does the rest, in terms of economic and social institutions and mechanisms, and in terms of a shared habitus that is deeply ingrained and internalized among the economic actors.⁹

Until [the publication of “The Use of Knowledge in Society”], the Socialist Calculation Debate was widely believed to have been won by the socialist opponents of Mises and Hayek—Lange chief among them—who advocated a mixed approach, whereby individual factory managers would be allowed to find the “right” price to charge for their products via trial-and-error learning through the market, while the Central Planning Board would set the prices of inputs. In fact, Mises and Hayek had not really altered their arguments over the course of the debate. But their social-democratic opponents, wedded as they were to neoclassical economics, initially took their case to be about the difficulty of computing the appropriate price levels, based on the given data—and not about the challenge of gathering and updating the data, which is never automatically “given.” Mises and Hayek, with varying degrees of clarity and emphasis, had been emphasizing this all along, but it took Hayek’s essay to drive the point home.¹⁰

Even if Hayek’s 1945 essay is now an oft-cited theoretical turning point, it is firmly rooted in the interwar era. Hayek had begun to develop his argument in “Monetary Theory and the Trade Cycle” (1933) and the lecture “Economics and Knowledge” (1937). More broadly, Hayek, like Mises, had been deeply disturbed by the rise of economic nationalism in the wake of World War I, with trade tariffs limiting international capital flows. Furthermore, World War I had spawned dirigiste war economies—and, to make matters worse for the free-marketeers, some authors discerned the beginnings of a future planned economy in the organizational efforts of the war, as well as the overall rise of large-scale

state organizations and business trusts. In *Von kommenden Dingen* (Of things to come, 1918), the German industrialist Walther Rathenau proposed a planned version of capitalism on the basis of his experiences organizing the war economy, while Vladimir Lenin claimed that the German postal service was a “splendidly-equipped mechanism” that could be taken over by the workers, becoming a nucleus of socialist organization.¹¹

Rathenau is quoted by Adolf A. Berle and Gardiner Means in *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932), which argues that actual control of large, “quasi-public” corporations increasingly lay with a new managerial class, rather than with the owners (i.e., stockholders), the proper capitalists. Berle and Means argue that the “atom of property” had been split into its components, “control and beneficial ownership.”¹² Theories and practices of planning on the corporate level and on the societal level were closely interlinked: former Trotskyist James Burnham built on this in his 1941 *The Managerial Revolution*.¹³ For Burnham, all social systems of the early 1940s were forms of managerialism. Burnham saw the forms of “moneyless” planning and organization within corporations and state organs of democratic societies—and on a larger scale in the economies of Russia and Germany—as evidence that nonmonetary ways of establishing value were on the rise and that goods were increasingly no longer seen as “abstracted embodiments of so many units of exchange value” but as “specific, quantitative entities fitted to serve certain needs and not others, independent, or partly independent, of exchange value.” In the end, this meant that the “managerial economy, by virtue of centralized control of the economy as a whole, is able to *plan* for and with the economy as a whole in a way that is not possible for capitalist economy, with its system of divisive and uncoordinated control.”¹⁴

After World War II, companies continued to be seen through the managerialist prism of the separation of ownership and control, and, as Grégoire Chamayou notes, to regard enterprise as a form of private government (by the managers) was a near consensus in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵ Rather than a machine for maximizing profit for investors/stockholders, the firm was seen as a society-within-society, led and planned by a caste of managers. Could or should such microsocieties be the nuclei of planning on a larger scale? Here automation came into the picture. One pioneering book on the subject was published in 1956 by Friedrich Pollock—who, far from coincidentally, is best known as a theorist of state capitalism. Much discussed across various factions of the radical left, this concept was developed most cogently by the post-Trotskyist Johnson-Forest Tendency with Raya Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James, and by the Frankfurt School, specifically Pollock.¹⁶ *State capitalism* refers to nominally capitalist societies that

depend increasingly on planning rather than on “free enterprise.” According to key council-communist thinkers such as Otto Rühle and Anton Pannekoek, the state socialism of the Soviet Union constituted a form of state capitalism, as it amounted to a kind of state-run version of industrial capitalism.¹⁷

In his 1956 book on the subject, Pollock argues that “in principle, only a planned economy can master the problems caused by automation in a rational manner.”¹⁸ Here, then, automation poses problems more than it offers solutions; its problems fuel the drive toward planning and state capitalism. Calculation debate veteran Lange took a more positive stance in 1967. Explicitly taking aim at Hayek’s disparagement of socialist planning, Lange presented computers as the solution to the problems of economic planning, rather than vice versa: “Let us put the simultaneous equations on an electronic computer and we shall obtain the solution in less than a second.”¹⁹ Something akin to this creed motivated the automation drive under the Yugoslav system of self-management, where IBM computers were used by companies such as Rade Končar.²⁰ Possibly more ambitious was the attempt in Salvador Allende’s Chile to implement cybernetic methods and information technology to forge a centrally planned (or coordinated) but non-Stalinist economy. Conceived largely by the British cybernetician and organizational consultant Stafford Beer, the Chilean Cybersyn project consisted of several elements, including two computer programs—an economic simulator and a “permanent suite”—that were to help make planning decisions, as well as a control center that looked like a set from a sci-fi film of the period, with console chairs designed by Gui Bonsiepe. With a telex network and a limited number of low- and midrange IBM computers, Cybersyn focused on planning on the basis of aggregated production data from socialized factories, which were run by “mixed” councils staffed by workers, managers, and technical experts.²¹

That this all came to an end with the 1973 U.S.-backed Pinochet coup means that the long-term prospects of this “cybernetic socialism in one country” can be discussed *ad infinitum*. The coup received support from neoliberals such as Hayek and Friedman, who pitted capitalism against democracy, which was seen as unable to protect the interests of “the market.” According to Chamayou, managerialism made the fatal mistake of politicizing the theory of the firm.²² Hardcore neoliberals were incensed at what they saw as a denaturation of the essence of capitalism. What is the world coming to, Friedman asked, if corporations are trying to be socially and ecologically responsible? They should be about profit, plain and simple—which means that they should be in the service of the owners, the capitalists.²³ Hayek had already developed grave doubts about

democracy due to the political and social upheavals in the wake of WWI. These doubts were confirmed when the Left was again in the ascendency in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Capitalism had to be saved from popular democracy. If Western democracies, under pressure from leftist contestations, were intent on curtailing corporate power, then the Pinochet regime was full of promise. Here, shock therapy was possible.²⁴

In the interwar period, Hayek had already come to the conclusion that the “free market” required the right legal framework to function.²⁵ To stave off the specter of socialist planning, legislative design work was needed. The invisible hand of the market needed a hand from governments and from nongovernment actors such as think tanks that influence policy. In line with that insight, neoliberal policy has largely focused on creating legal frameworks for transforming corporations into lean war machines that can outsource much of their production and many of their “responsibilities,” having nominal headquarters in tax havens—the aim being profit maximization for the investors, while managers are incentivized with stock options. Neoliberalism has thus been a massive, coordinated effort involving careful planning, a relentless push to impose an agenda revolving around the magic word *freedom*—a freedom for capital and its privileged servants. In the planetary ruins wrought by this particular form of world-making, historical forms of socialist planning and calculation have renewed resonance.

Would the kinds of coordination and planning that were attempted then on IBM mainframe computers not be far more feasible now—using the very Silicon Valley technologies that have exacerbated and accelerated wealth inequality, precarity, dispossession, and untrammelled extraction? Does contemporary Big Data-driven capitalism contain the seeds of planning and socialization? Here the reconstructions of the Chilean and Yugoslav experiments by scholars such as Eden Medina and Rujana Rebernjak factor into the Calculation Debate 2.0.²⁶ However, the Yugoslav case in particular was not uncontested on the Left at the time. Western council communists were not impressed that Yugoslav “workers’ councils” existed by the grace of the state and party bureaucracy.²⁷ Was this workers’ control or rule by a technocratic elite? If the postwar situation appears to contain prefigurations of the present, it was also traversed by echoes of prewar debates—and these, too, bear revisiting in the current conjuncture.

In light of such critiques, one may well ask whether much current “calculation discourse” is not likewise prone to forms of technological solutionism, amounting to little more than promises to take over existing organizational structures and “scale up” economic planning without fundamentally altering productive rela-

tions—and addressing the social and ecological cost of the organizations that are to be “taken over” with more than a few perfunctory words. One way of beginning to address such questions is to reintroduce the council into the socialist planning debate: not as a ready-made solution, but as part of a historical dialectic—the dialectic of plan and council—that can be abrogated only at the cost of a relapse into technocratic managerialism.

Abstract Representation and Its Discontents: The Council as Concrete Utopia

Oskar Negt has memorably characterized workers’ councils as “the concrete utopia of the twentieth century.”²⁸ Indeed, the council form is *a utopia of concretion* in that it rejects the politics of what has been termed *abstract representation*. The historian Paul Friedland uses this term to characterize the concept of political representation developed during the French Revolution by Abbé Sieyès, in contradistinction to *corporational representation* under the Ancien Régime.²⁹ Based on a protosociological account of the division of labor in modern societies, Sieyès argued that politics, too, was best left to the specialists, to professional politicians, so the role of “the people” should to be reduced to elections. Direct democracy was anathema.³⁰ To constitute the feudal Estates General, the representatives of the three estates (nobility, clergy, bourgeoisie) were selected in local meetings during which the delegates were also given a binding cahier with agreed-on political positions.³¹ Precisely this *mandat impératif* was scuppered in modern parliamentary democracy—hence the familiar sight of politicians forgetting about their election promises once in office.

In 1818, the German reactionary romantic Adam Müller defended the feudal society of estates as an “organic state,” pitting this politico-aesthetic ideal against the “newfangled head-, soul- and money-representation,” which he considered a dangerous French innovation.³² Leftists, too, attacked abstract representation. As Jonathan Beecher writes in his biography of Charles Fourier, “One of the most striking intellectual developments of the postrevolutionary period in Europe was the growth of interest in groups and communities, both as constituents of society and as influences on individual personality and behavior.”³³ Reacting to “the destruction of parish, guild, and other primary groups during the French Revolution,” reactionary and progressive thinkers alike broke with the eighteenth century’s “atomistic conception of society as a network of specific and willed relationships entered into by free, autonomous and rational individuals.”³⁴ Marx himself, in his early essay on the “Jewish Question,” homed in on the contradiction between the “living individual,” as a social and economic (as well as religious) subject, and the abstract *citoyen* or citizen. If the living individual

is part of society, the citizen is a member of a political and public sphere that revolves around “the *general* concern of the nation, ideally independent of those *particular* elements of civil life.”³⁵

In his later reflections on the Paris Commune, Marx notes that the Commune’s elected ward councilors were “responsible and revocable at short terms” and that “The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time.”³⁶ In the “national organization” that was to be developed—a goal cut short by the Commune’s brutal suppression—“the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet,” and the

rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents.³⁷

Here the feudal binding mandate returns in a communist register.

In the early twentieth century, a broad leftist spectrum across the anarchist-communist divide agreed on the importance of councils. The distinct movement known as council communism, however, emerged out of a double betrayal of the council form. In the context of the (failed) German Revolution of November 1918, the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands; Social Democratic Party of Germany) quickly co-opted and subverted the councilist movement, making it work toward its own abolition. The national assembly of councils, the Reichsrätekongress of 16–21 December 1918, was dominated by Friedrich Ebert’s SPD and embraced parliamentary democracy. It instituted a transitional Zentralrat der Deutschen Sozialistischen Republik (Central Council of the German Socialist Republic) that duly abdicated in favor of the newly elected Nationalversammlung after a few months.³⁸ Later attempts to institute radical council republics in (parts of) Germany, such as the Bavarian Räterepublik of 1919, were brutally suppressed. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik leadership of the Soviet Union quickly sidelined or suppressed the councils (i.e., the soviets) to establish a party dictatorship. A “left communist” or council-communist opposition emerged, associated with Dutch and German activists and theorists such as Pannekoek and Rühle.³⁹

Germany in the period 1919–1922 provided the social and political fulcrum. Here, council-communist and artistic avant-garde activism intermingled (and to some extent merged) on the pages of Franz Pfemfert’s magazine *Die Aktion* and in political parties and nonparty organizations such as the KAPD (Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands; Communist Workers’ Party of Germany), the affil-

iated AAUD (Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands; General Workers' Union of Germany), and especially in the breakaway AAU-E (Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union-Einheitsorganisation; General Workers' Union-Unified Organization), with Rühle as its central ideologue.⁴⁰ The AAU-E rejected the party form and parliamentarianism, as well as trade unions. Rühle decreed that "Revolution is not a party matter" and that elections should be boycotted. Without becoming Leninist "professional revolutionaries," the AAU-E attempted to organize leftist activism around the factory or firm—the *Betrieb*. While still under capitalist conditions, self-organized *Betriebsorganisationen* (BOs) were to prepare the ground for the rule of the *Räte* (councils).⁴¹ The incompatibility of this fully fledged council-communist model with Leninism was fast becoming apparent.

For a short transitional period, the left-communists were tolerated within the Communist International (the Comintern, or Third International), founded in Moscow in March 1919.⁴² However, Lenin's 1920 screed *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*—an attack on the Dutch Marxist Pannekoek, influential in Germany—both articulated and deepened the divide between state socialists and councilists.⁴³ Marginalized and suppressed by both social democrats and Bolsheviks, the various German councilist organizations had essentially shrunk to the status of small sects by 1923.⁴⁴ In this situation, the German-Dutch theorists and activists began to hone their theoretical position, which would give council communism an afterlife. As a *theorem*, the council underwent a resurgence in the later 1960s. The language of councils haunted the political discourse of the Situationist International (SI), which attacked the Yugoslav workers' councils as a sham.⁴⁵ Much as the SI was allergic to any cult of the worker and of labor ("Ne travaillez jamais"), the council seemed to be the only remotely viable postcapitalist organizational form out there. It had the additional virtue of not just being communist but also anti-Leninist and anti-Maoist—a point that the situationist-dominated Council for the Maintenance of Occupations drove home on May 17, 1968, with telegrams to the Kremlin and the Chinese Politburo:

SHAKE IN YOUR SHOES BUREAUCRATS STOP THE INTERNATIONAL
POWER OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS WILL SOON WIPE YOU OUT
STOP HUMANITY WON'T BE HAPPY TILL THE LAST BUREAUCRAT IS
HANGED WITH THE GUTS OF THE LAST CAPITALIST STOP LONG
LIVE FACTORY OCCUPATIONS STOP LONG LIVE THE GREAT CHINESE
PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1927 BETRAYED BY THE STALINIST
BUREAUCRATS STOP LONG LIVE THE PROLETARIANS OF CANTON
AND ELSEWHERE WHO HAVE TAKEN UP ARMS AGAINST THE SO-
CALLED PEOPLE'S ARMY STOP LONG LIVE THE CHINESE WORKERS



AND STUDENTS WHO HAVE ATTACKED
THE SO-CALLED CULTURAL REVOLU-
TION AND THE MAOIST BUREAUCRATIC

ORDER STOP LONG LIVE REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM STOP DOWN
WITH THE STATE STOP OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S
FREE SORBONNE⁴⁶

In a harsh but not exactly unfair judgment of the situationists' councilism, the American zine *Not Bored!* accused the SI of a failure of critical nerve and a descent into dogma: "the power of the councils remained a simple article of faith, a totally unexamined assumption."⁴⁷ Indeed, the French workers clearly did not follow the situationist script in May 1968. Occupied factories would have their assemblies, but these assemblies did not constitute themselves *as councils*; that is, as the political organs of a postcapitalist economy.⁴⁸ In the absence of actually existing councils, battles were waged for history. The Paris-Beijing telegram mentions the 1927 Guangzhou Uprising during which the city government was briefly placed in the hands of a Soviet of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasant Deputies. The telegram to Moscow memorializes Leon Trotsky's suppression of the Kronstadt Soldiers' Soviet.

Alexander Kluge's 1968 film *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: Ratlos* (*Artists under the Big Top: Perplexed*) at one point suggests that "utopia keeps getting better while we are waiting for it [*Die Utopie wird immer besser, während wir auf sie warten*]." The situationists seem to have taken this to heart; they "improved" on prewar theory by remaining strategically vague about how a councilist economy and society would actually function. Precisely because they did not want to formalize postcapitalist society, they sided with councils as concrete if highly contingent formations that were to emerge under revolutionary circumstances—situations that needed to be constructed in the moment. Their take on the council remained a counterfactual utopia rather than an actionable model. One is hard pressed to imagine that they would have gotten excited about the more systematic efforts of Pannekoek or Jan Appel from the 1920s and 1930s.

In Amsterdam on 22 November 1969, a group that included artist Tjebbe van Tijen, situationist Tony Verlaan, and former Provo movement leader Rob Stolk disrupted the opening night of German playwright Tankred Dorst's play *Ernst Toller* (1968).⁴⁹ Van Tijen identifies this intervention as *Toller Action—Revolution Is No Theatre*.⁵⁰ For the perpetrators, Dorst's play amounted to an unacceptable artistic farce about the Bavarian Council Republic of 1919, presenting it as a bohemian shambles. Its protagonist, the expressionist playwright and revolutionary leader Ernst Toller, is characterized by Dorst as being almost as much out of

Opposite: Artist unknown. Drawing of the *Toller Aktion*, 1969. From *De Volkskrant* (24 November 1969).

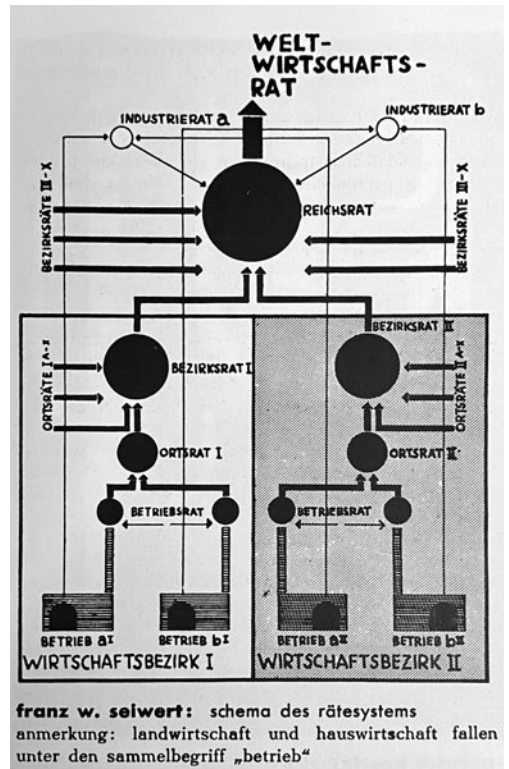
Right: Franz Wilhelm Seiwert. "Schema des Räteystems" (Schema of the council system), 1932. From *a bis z* (1932).

depth as his comrades. A pamphlet distributed during the premiere notes that "Toller may not be performed because 'power to the (workers) councils' is impossible on stage and contrary to the idea of 'working councils' itself"—an idea that "has already been corrupted by trade unions and the bosses."⁵¹ A newspaper illustration of van Tijen's *Aktion* suggests a messy and whirling happening: a concrete, (de)constructed situation standing in for the absence of actual councils.

Compare this with a 1932 diagram of the *Räte-system* by the councilist artist Franz Wilhelm Seiwert. It takes the form of a flow-chart in which input from workers' councils goes upward to a central council—a clear rejection of top-down planning that, while devoid of the economic complexity of Appel or Pannekoek's writings, suggests a sense of order and process that is utterly alien to situationist spontaneism.⁵² Today, however, detailed proposals for merging political and economic decision-making through councils have returned with a vengeance. As technology offers new forms of concretion, earlier Dutch-German system building and model making, with its emphasis on quantification and calculation, attain a new relevance in the digital realm. So do their unresolved problems, constitutive contradictions, and unaddressed blind spots.

Council-Form and Value-Form

In 1931, different factions of the councilist movement, including (part of the) AAU-E, merged to create the KAUD (Kommunistische Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands or Communist Workers Union of Germany; it is also referred to as KAU). Never counting more than several hundred members, the KAUD was a last-ditch attempt to stem the tide. It was associated with the Holland-based GIC (Groep van Internationale Communisten; Group of International Communists). Also known by its German acronym, GIK, this group included Jan Appel and Henk Canne Meijer, and Pannekoek was a close interlocutor.⁵³ In contrast to some of the German and Danish council communists, the Dutch GIC argued that the time was not ripe for centralized mass agitation. They noted that if in the "revolutionary period" of 1919–1920 they had called for independent *Betriebsorganisationen* as the basis for achieving councilist control over production, now it was up to independent discussion and propaganda groups to attain intellectual (*verstandesgemäße*) control of social forces.⁵⁴ German and Danish councilists, as well as Paul Mattick in the United States, offered ripostes; however, the GIC



essentially got what it wanted, as what remained of the movement was fundamentally an emaciated network given to theorization. The GIC published the *Rätekorrespondenz*, and the Chicago-based group around Mattick and Karl Korsch put out the *International Council Correspondence*, the English-language counterpart to the *Rätekorrespondenz*.⁵⁵

The shift from the periodicals *Die proletarische Revolution* and *Die Aktion* (ending in 1932) to the typewritten and mimeographed *Rätekorrespondenz* in 1934 is symptomatic of a movement that had all but gone underground even outside Nazi Germany. As the councilist utopia faded into the distance, it did attain a greater degree of theoretical elaboration. Published as a collective GIC treatise in 1930, the *Grundprinzipien der kommunistischen Produktion und Verteilung* (*The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*) proved foundational and became a point of reference for Pannekoek and the Dutch and German groups in general. Probably going back to notes made by Appel while in prison in 1923–1925 and later elaborated with input from Meijer and others, the *Grundprinzipien* critiques early Bolshevik attempts to abolish money; that is, any unit of calculation (*Recheneinheit*) as such.⁵⁶ Even if money were abolished, a unit of accounting would nonetheless still be needed.

Appel proposes a system of bookkeeping based on a quantifiable system of labor hours: what goes “in and out” is registered by any company or productive unit in an account. As a good Marxist, Appel argues that the measure of the labor in products has to be the socially average/necessary labor time. Companies in the same line of business would have to form industry branches so that the average working time for comparable products could be established. Hence, labor power is still expressed in quantified and abstract terms, if no longer mediated by monetary exchange. As the GIC insisted, councils were not cooperatives, as cooperatives ultimately fend for themselves in a capitalist society, whereas councils should be considered to represent the whole of society.⁵⁷ One cannot socialize a single factory and leave it at that; socialization in a single factory would be as doomed as socialism in one country. However, even if councils succeeded in reorganizing the whole economy, one could still wonder what exactly the GIC model (as elaborated by Appel and later by Pannekoek) means for the hold of the value-form on society.

As theorized by Marx, and later by Marxists such as Alfred Sohn-Rethel, the value-form is what structures relations through the rule of equivalence, as manifested in the exchange value of various commodities—meaning that one coat is equivalent to twenty yards of linen, for instance. The value-form thus shapes organizations and institutions; it delineates the field of possibility even

for radical practice. In Sohn-Rethel's account—which he began developing in the 1920s in the wake of the failed German Revolution, when he was on the fringes of the Frankfurt School—the value-form is fundamentally transhistorical, pre-dating capitalism and having origins in antiquity. The *basic* value-form, or exchange-value, comes into being with money, which Sohn-Rethel equates with the introduction of metal coins in Greece around 600 BCE.⁵⁸ With David Harvey, one can argue that the specifically *capitalist* value-form consists of the relation between exchange-value and what Marx simply terms *the value* of a commodity, as determined by socially necessary labor time.⁵⁹ This value per se could be termed *labor value* to minimize the risk of confusion. In the specifically capitalist value-form, as analyzed by Marx, commodities seemingly relate to one another purely as exchange value, on the market (commodity fetishism), but *in fact* their relative values are determined by the socially necessary labor time put into their production. A revolution would thus have to be a revolution of value, which means a revolution of production—not a merely political revolution.⁶⁰ This is something that Sohn-Rethel and the council communists could agree on—and the GIC model tries to break with the reign of exchange value by siding with substantive value, as expressed no longer in money but in *quantified units of labor-power that cannot be traded or hoarded*, unlike commodities or money.⁶¹

Appel and his comrades, then, home in on the element of labor, while abandoning the historical bearer of the value-form: money as the medium of exchange-value. Labor time becomes the new unit of calculation. It was capitalism that made labor-power the substance of value; the councilist model keeps the substance while jettisoning the “autonomous” exchange-value expressed by prices. In his 1970 preface to the *Grundprinzipien*, Mattick argues that such labor-based calculation puts an end to the “law of value” as a seemingly automatic force holding sway with its invisible hand.⁶² However, compared to situationist vistas of a clean breakthrough into a world of lived and unquantifiable creativity, this model is more modest. What emerges from the GIC model could be termed a “socialized value-form” that still has the quantitative and comparative function; it still allows for comparisons between a coat and a quantity of linen, for instance, but now more securely on the basis of a direct calculation in time units. This is a transformed, *postcapitalist* value form that is the mirror image of Sohn-Rethel's *precapitalist* basic value-form.

Even while the *Grundprinzipien* appear orthodox in their use of “socially necessary labor time” to calculate value, they nonetheless decenter this Marxian category, which is deemed applicable only to productive industrial labor. To address this limitation, a more general concept of “average social reproduction

time” is proposed, which applies to services as well as production—and which can encompass more varied levels of skill, ability, and subjectivity, since it is not calculated on the basis of competitive pricing.⁶³ And yet: the GIC’s transvaluation of value was marked by compromise. With its quantitative drive, the whole enterprise can seem like an oneiric “purification” of industrial capitalism rather than a real breakthrough. In a 1938 letter to Mattick, Korsch had already articulated such a critique, and in his 1970 preface Mattick notes that “under the conditions of a communist economy an abundance of means of consumption can be produced that renders a calculation of individual shares superfluous.”⁶⁴ Attempting to leapfrog the compromises of any transitional period, the situationists always had this final goal in sight. The GIC model would be applicable precisely to the period of transition—a point made more explicitly in the version of the model laid out in Pannekoek’s book *Workers’ Councils* (1946).

Pannekoek essentially follows Appel’s theory of calculation but emphasizes its contingent implementation under the conditions of an undoubtedly messy and transitional socialism. Indeed, workers’ councils themselves are “the form of organization during the transition period in which the working class is fighting for dominance, is destroying capitalism and is organizing social production.”⁶⁵ Pannekoek stresses that, even while councilist bookkeeping appropriates capitalist methods, it changes the nature of those methods:

The general bookkeeping, comprehending and encompassing the administrations of the separate enterprises, combines them all into a representation of the economic process of society. In different degrees of range it registers the entire process of transformation of matter, following it from the raw materials at their origin, through all the factories, through all the hands, down to the goods ready for consumption. In uniting the results of co-operating enterprises of a sort into one whole it compares their efficiency, it averages the hours of labor needed and directs the attention to the ways open for progress. Once the organization of production has been carried out the administration is the comparatively simple task of a network of interconnected computing offices. Every enterprise, every contingent group of enterprises, every branch of production, every township or district, for production and for consumption, has its office, to take care of the administration, to collect, to treat and to discuss the figures and to put them into a perspicuous form easy to survey. Their combined work makes the material basis of life a mentally dominated process. As a plain and intelligible numerical image the process of production is laid open to everybody’s views. Here mankind views and controls its own life. What the workers and

their councils devise and plan in organized collaboration is shown in character and results in the figures of bookkeeping. Only because they are perpetually before the eyes of every worker the direction of social production by the producers themselves is rendered possible. . . . For the first time in history the economic life, in general and in detail, lies as an open book before the eyes of mankind. The foundations of society, under capitalism a huge mass hidden in the dark depths, dimly lighted here and there by statistics on commerce and production, now has entered into the full daylight and shows its detailed structure.⁶⁶

The GIC model contrasts councilist organization not just with the top-down capitalist company but also with the centralized and hierarchical state. For the GIC, central planning is neither desirable nor necessary. Instead of a central plan, an association of councils coordinates production, distribution, and consumption; associations of consumers register needs; and reproduction in general is socially coordinated.⁶⁷ Here we can begin to see the relevance and resonance of such seemingly arcane theorizations in the age of the new Calculation Debate—as well as for current European debates about the return of a centralized war economy, both in the context of the war in Ukraine and in that of the needed ecological restructuring of the economy.⁶⁸ If we do not want digital Stalinism or Maoism, then councilism needs to be brought to bear on the calculation debate without denying its own inner tensions and contradictions—with the council as “concrete utopia” oscillating between operational model and counterfactual promise.

When Appel restated and elaborated on the GIC model in the *Rätekorrespondenz* in the summer of 1935, he also intervened in debates about economic centralization at the national level—a tendency that could be discerned in democratic and fascist states, as well as, obviously, in the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ Whether all of the above could be characterized as forms of state capitalism was a hotly debated question. Appel specifically mentions the Austrian philosopher and Marxist Otto Neurath as one proponent of centralized planning. If Neurath’s top-down approach was incompatible with the councilist model, the GIC likewise rejected Neurath’s insistence that a full-fledged communist (planned) economy would have to be *an economy in kind*, a *Naturalwirtschaft*. While Neurath noted that the economy in kind “will probably be realized completely as little as the money-oriented trade economy” (since the latter was not in fact the liberal utopia of the free market but was shaped by monopolies, trusts, and government policies), he emphasized the goal rather than any transitional steps or compromises along the way.

Working through the stymied potentials and founding contradictions of the

events of 1917–1921—the Russian Revolution, the failed German Revolution(s), and their fallout—Neurath and the council communists developed positions that are dialectically intertwined, attempting to resolve the tensions between councils and (central) planning in different ways. Pannekoek’s emphasis on statistics strikes a positively Neurathian note. With Neurath, too, it pays to pay attention to the potential *Jetztzeit* lurking in the apparently obsolete.

Visual Aids

World War I had confirmed Neurath’s conviction, already formed in the context of conflicts such as the Balkan Wars, that forms of planning by the state and by large industrial trusts could be precursors to—even incubators of—a planned socialist economy: “To socialize an economy means to lead it toward a planned administration for and by society. Socialization presupposes that an economic plan is realised by some decisive central body or other.”⁷⁰ Neurath noted—as did Lenin—that many parts of the economy were actually not shaped by “the free market.” Vast organizations such as the Deutsche Post, various trusts, and what could be called the military-industrial complex of the parties in WWI, were planned rather than entrusted to “the laws of supply and demand.” The “free trade economy” was thus already being replaced by an “administrative economy,” and this administrative economy would ultimately have to be “an economy in kind” rather than one relying on the money-form or even on *Arbeitszeitrechnung* (calculation in labor time). If the council communists, as good Marxists, sided with labor as the source of value and sought and proposed to replace the money-form with a direct calculation of labor, Neurath tampered with the value-form by turning exchange value into a direct calculation in kind: linen and coats—and everything else—are what matters and what is exchanged. And this needs central coordination: “Changes in property relations, nationalization, appropriation through workers’ councils can be called socialization only as means of a planned shaping of the economy. How could an individual workers’ councilor or an individual partnership of production vouch for the planned character of the economy as a whole?”⁷¹

Neurath became involved in the Bavarian Räterepublik of 1919; his acquaintance Toller was among his liaisons.⁷² Neurath outlined his vision to the plenary session of the Münchner Arbeiterrat on 25 January 1919, during an early phase of the revolutionary process. Neurath pulled no punches and stated out loud that a councilist reorganization of production and society from below would mean a “paralyzation of production.”⁷³ What was needed was central planning, and he had no objections to “zentrale Arbeiterausschüsse” (central workers’ committees)

functioning as the government's control organs.⁷⁴ Neurath clearly saw this as an opportunity to begin the realization of his ideas on socialization and planning, which he had developed in the context of the war economy of WWI:

After many incidents I was entrusted, as President of the Central Office of Economics, with the socialization of Bavaria. What hitherto I had yearned for as the future, I can now myself help to fashion in the service of the people, and soon, I hope, in the service of the free world.⁷⁵

Established in late March, the Zentralwirtschaftsamt (Central Economic Office) under Neurath continued to function, or at least to exist, when the Bavarian republic was officially declared a council republic in early April. Lasting from early April until its suppression in early May, the precarious and chaotic Bavarian Council Republic—which itself went through two distinct phases—would hardly have been conducive to the implementation of economic plans.

In a prefiguration of (post)operaist conceptions of the “social factory” that would no doubt horrify the Italian thinkers, Neurath treats society as such as one big factory or company: “one can compare the entire socialist economy to a single large factory that has no [inner] market” (i.e., processes within the company are planned rather than “free market” exchanges).⁷⁶ Despite the various problems with Neurath's vision, it was no blindly productivist, Stakhanovist proposal. In fact, a particularly strong and appealing feature of Neurath's insistence on doing away with a binding unit of value or bookkeeping is his insistence on the incommensurability of various factors. When determining how much coal to mine, for instance, how is one to weigh the “protection of human forces” and the “protection of coal deposits”?⁷⁷ What concerned Neurath in the latter case was not so much the ecological consequences of carbon-fuel extraction as the economic and social consequences of using up all the coal before alternative energy sources were developed. To expect a post-1960s ecological consciousness of him would be ahistorical. Nonetheless, his insistence on the political nature of decisions can easily be enriched with ecological dimensions. Plans must be developed on the basis of an assessment of real alternatives rather than as implementations of a purportedly single “economic law”: “The only way to compare economic plans is the same way one compares pears or books: one comes to prefer one plan over another on the basis of an overall assessment [*Gesamteinschätzung*].”⁷⁸

Most of the other socialist protagonists in the Calculation Debate agreed with Neurath's general historical narrative about the rise of planning within the capitalist economy and the transition to socialism, although Neurath was nearly unique in insisting on full socialization and the transition to communism as the



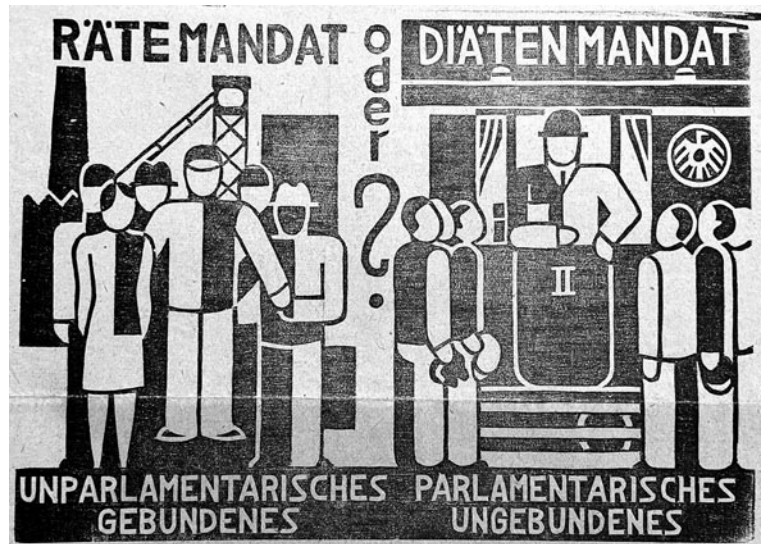
ultimate horizon; others tended toward a social-democratic “market socialism.” Neurath shared his leftist peers’ neoclassical outlook. If he did not base his economy on labor-value, it is because he did not

subscribe to the labor theory of value. What matters is supply and demand, but now no longer mediated by prices and instead centrally regulated on the basis of actual production and consumption. The communist planned economy would be in kind—even though Neurath acknowledged that this tendency might perhaps never reach its end point.⁷⁹ This made him the perfect enemy for the socialists’ main antagonist, Mises: a textbook case to be taken apart. As Johanna Bockman notes, Mises agreed that a fully socialized economy would have to do away with money and revolve around central planning in kind; however, he argued that Neurath failed to understand the fundamental problems involved.⁸⁰ “Without markets, private property, and market prices, it would be impossible to decide rationally how to act in the economy. He thus also considered socialism and markets as mutually exclusive categories. Therefore, according to Mises, socialism—understood as a centrally planned economy—was impossible.”⁸¹

Deeply concerned by the war economy’s encroachments on the “free market” and by the revolutionary turmoil of “Red Vienna,” Mises and his acolytes, including Hayek, were busy laying the foundations of what later came to be known as neoliberalism while working for the Vienna Chamber of Commerce during the 1920s.⁸² While the socialists in the debate were universalists who considered the models of neoclassical theory to be equally applicable to capitalism and socialism, Mises and Hayek were dualists, emphasizing that capitalism and socialism are fundamentally different—and that socialism/communism simply would not work as well and as efficiently as a capitalist market. This is when, in the sleight of hand that is foundational for neoliberalism, capitalism becomes “the market economy,” and the main focus of policy (at least as far as stated intentions go) becomes protection of “the free market.”⁸³ As Max Haiven notes, neoliberal economists have managed to impose their belief that “there was essentially an almost mimetic relationship between social reality and the representational forms of economic measurement and theory, largely by masquerading as a qualitative ‘science’ whose discourse could only be challenged at the level of statistic minutiae, and only by duly ordained experts.”⁸⁴ A theoretical sophisticate such as Hayek, however, doubted that the economy could ever be represented. As Quinn Slobodian argues, this pushed Hayek to focus on the more tangible institutions that shape the economy, creating an activist drive to influence policy-making.⁸⁵ In the neoliberal polity, capital skews and shapes political rep-

Opposite: Gerd Arntz. *Räte u. Betrieb Organisation* (Councils and company organization). From *Die proletarische Revolution* (January 1928).

Right: Gerd Arntz. *Rätemandat oder Diätenmandat?* (Council mandate or parliamentary allowance mandate?). From *Die proletarische Revolution* (April 1928).



representation through think tanks and lobbying, gerrymandering and voter suppression. Bespoke parliamentarians push through corporate-friendly legislation that is ostensibly about giving “the market” free rein in accordance with the ideologemes proffered by think tanks.

The socialists in the Calculation Debate enthusiastically played the part of (self-)appointed experts who attempted a mimetic merger between economic reality and its mathematical representation. Neurath introduced a crucial difference into their discourse: with his emphasis on economy in kind, he developed a system of visual statistics that privileged precisely material production and social reality rather than capital or credit. Working with collaborators such as his later wife, Marie Reidemeister, and the artist Gerd Arntz, who became his chief designer in the late 1920s, Neurath developed Isotype at the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum (Museum of Society and Economy) in Vienna to quantify industrial output and various social factors (e.g., population size, occupations, unemployment, illnesses, mortality).⁸⁶ These were clearly intended as planning aids, though they never came to function in a fully socialized economy; the closest they came was when the Viennese group helped establish the IZOSTAT agency in Moscow in 1931, though Neurath and company withdrew in 1934. Isotype is a proposal for a different kind of representation, one that is more democratic and transparent. Neurath’s system of pictorial statistics is a toolkit for the coming economy in kind.⁸⁷ Arguably, Allende’s Chile sought to effect a shift toward a Neurathian economy in kind: Cybersyn focused on items that would meet people’s needs, not on exchange value.

Neurath was much more inclined toward central planning than his chief designer, Arntz, who had a background in the AAU-E and the Kölner Progressive, an artist group with councilist leanings. Founded by Seiwert, the Cologne Progressives developed a figurative constructivism that they saw as being aligned with the political struggle of the AAU-E, even as Arntz was working for Neurath and Seiwert published some of the results of their work in *a bis z*.⁸⁸ Such coexistence on the printed page is a reminder of the need to conceive of such positions, and of planning and councilist self-organization, as dialectically interlinked rather than opposed in a frozen binary.

Seiwert himself published articles and illustrations in *Die proletarische Revolution*, to which Arntz also contributed woodcut illustrations that amount



Cover of *The Survey* (Graphic Number), March 1932, with Isotype illustration credited to Otto Neurath.

to formally ambitious propaganda for the AAU-E. *Die proletarische Revolution*, for instance, published an Arntz composition in which the phrases “Councils and Company” (*Räte u. Betrieb*) and “Organization” are integrated in a composition that blends abstracted industrial structures with (male) workers, the latter sharing the same postcubist black-and-white idiom with the former, yet adding a density that suggests they cannot and will not be absorbed into alien-

ating structures indefinitely. Another print opposes the *Rätemandat* (council mandate) as a binding and nonparliamentary form of delegation to a nonbinding parliamentary *Diätenmandat* (salaried mandate). Whereas the left-hand side shows a worker-councilor hand in hand with fellow (male and female) workers in an industrial setting, the right shows a bourgeois representative looking out of a train coach, about to leave his constituents behind.

After the fall of “Red Vienna,” Isotype found refuge in progressive Dutch municipalities such as Amsterdam and in the kind of national organizations that Neurath tended to see as nuclei of a planned economy: the Dutch postal service and (semi)governmental planning councils and bureaus of statistics. This also became the sphere of Arntz’s professional life: having survived WWII, he became a worker for the postwar Keynesian welfare state, living long enough to see his early 1920s work rediscovered in the wake of May 1968. In the 1970s and 1980s, his councilist compositions donned the covers of booklets and brochures; they were exhibited and editioned and even provided backdrops for punk gigs.⁸⁹ The German artist Andreas Siekmann, who came of age in the 1980s and early 1990s in a political and cultural landscape marked by post-’68 positions, would become a prolific Arntz appropriator and updater.

Siekmann quotes *Diätenmandat oder Rätemandat* in one of the drawings that constitute his installation *Aus: Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung/From: Limited Liability Company* (1996–2002). The main motif of this series, an empty pair of jeans, is likewise derived from Arntz, though it is drawn not as an Arntzian icon but with depth and relief: Siekmann shows this pair of jeans wandering around the corporate wasteland of 1990s “deregulation,” financialization, and precarity. Siekmann and his partner, Alice Creischer, are grounded in a loose continuum of post-1968 cultural and political positions and have immersed themselves in the historical practices of the Cologne Progressives, particularly in the work of Neurath and Arntz. A reprint of Seiwert’s writings by the Karin Kramer

Andreas Siekmann. From the series *The Economic Power of Public Opinion & the Public Power of Economic Opinion: Think Factories, Think Tanks and the Privatization of Power*. Part of the installation of the same title (2012), also published as an annotated series on *Open! Online* (2015).

Statistics (think tanks)



Verlag, which had emerged out of the Berlin commune scene of the late 1960s, proved fruitful.⁹⁰ This volume included a complete facsimile of *a bis z* (1929–1933), Seiwert's journal in the dying days of Weimar; it featured photographs by August Sander, essays by Seiwert and Raoul Hausmann, and examples of Neurath/Arntz graphics.

At a moment marked by a renewed imperialism of the value-form under neoliberalism, Creischer and Siekmann started producing new plates based on, or inspired by, plates from the atlas *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* (Society and economy, 1930).⁹¹ Fetishizing neither the council model nor the plan, Creischer and Siekmann were invested precisely in the project of critical representation. Isotype provided them with tools not for planning but for imagining and imaging society otherwise, for intervening in a visual culture intent on invisibilizing the unemployed and migrants and on perpetuating other forms of structural economic and ecological violence. Early “Atlas” plates by Creischer and Siekmann show “Fortress Europe” being closed off for migrants in the Mediterranean—and the death toll resulting from this. A more recent plate focuses on the hidden ecological costs of Bitcoin—a technolibertarian cryptocurrency that exemplifies the principle of the privatization of profits and the socialization of costs.

In several works, Siekmann foregrounds neoliberal economics itself—and neoliberal *economists*, the “duly ordained experts” that not so much represent as remake reality through their models. In a series of drawings for which he has adapted and expanded the Neurathian idiom, using it to create allegorical tableaux rather than quantitative charts, Siekmann tracks the rise of think tanks (*Denkfabriken*, “think factories,” in German), starting with the Mont Pelerin Society founded by Hayek after WWII as an incubator and multiplier of neoliberal ideology and policy.⁹² The think tank is the anticouncil, a shadowy outfit that seeks to shape policy by bypassing even abstract democratic representation.

Hayek also returns as one of the plasticine portrait busts in Siekmann's installation *Heads* (2021), an assembly of economists, arranged in various groups. Ranging from the eighteenth century to Silicon Valley, the assembly shows entangled genealogies of (neo)liberal “free market” ideology. As with the *Denkfabriken* series, it suggests that much forethought and planning went into the imposition of economic parameters that are supposedly about safeguarding

Mont Pelerin Society





the principle of “free competition.” The press release for the *Heads* exhibition quotes Hayek to the effect that the market is an “information processor” that can be distorted only by attempts at government intervention; that is, by planning—with the text noting that this has been literalized in the context of Big Data, resulting in a negation of the individual freedom that is at the basis of liberal ideology.⁹³ *Heads* is thus situated in the context of the new, data-driven iteration of debate on calculation and planning. As an installation, it creates a *Denkraum* that seems to call for activation, for a dialogue not just among the plasticine heads but among visitors who might turn the space into an assembly.

Create Digital Councils!

Some insightful contributions notwithstanding, the new calculation debate at times seems like a phantasmatic recasting of hypercapitalist organizations as incubators of socialism. In the attention economy of memeified theory, catchy claims can easily trump conceptual precision and analytical rigor.⁹⁴ Many buy into a liberal imaginary of the “free market” and wish to improve it. Capitalism, however, has never been built on free persons performing free labor but on degrees of force and enslavement and on violent extractivism. As Oliver Schlaudt argues, regarding Amazon as the cradle of a new form of socialism is a fallacy that springs from adopting central presuppositions of the historical planning debate, such as Neurath or Lenin’s belief that existing organizational structures and forms of production can be taken over for progressive purposes while otherwise remaining essentially the same.⁹⁵ Lenin’s example of the Deutsche Post as an exemplary organization now becomes Walmart or Amazon. In the words of the Berlin-based collective Friends of the Classless Society,

Where left-wing computer enthusiasts find the seeds of a new mode of production, which can already be seen in today’s Industry 4.0, there is above all a triumph of capital over labour. The idea that new, digital “options for action expand the workers’ disposition over the conditions of their activities” (Stefan Meretz) must sound like a sick joke in the ears of every Amazon worker. This circumstance, and the fact that just a handful of

Opposite: Andreas Siekmann.
Heads, 2019–2021. Exhibition
view, Galerie Barbara Weiss,
Berlin, 2021.

Right: August Sander.
Geistesarbeiter des Proletariats
(*Proletarian intellectuals*):
Else Schuler, Tristan Rémy,
Franz Wilhelm Seiwert, Gerd
Arntz, ca. 1925.



capitalists would be enough to secure the status quo given the present state of development of destructive forces, even if only at the expense of destroying the world, is familiar to those critics who see in this development nothing but a technological attack by elites on social movements and the allegedly insubordinate lower classes. One weakness of this theoretical tendency is that rather than making capitalism responsible for the current forms of technological development, it lays the blame on a small group of powerful people whose sovereign ability to act is overestimated, even if such individuals and their strategies undoubtedly do exist.⁹⁶

Here one needs to take onboard Morozov's point that the market does not just provide "objective information" but also creates an environment for profit-oriented activity, as well as historical critiques such as Karl William Kapp's pioneering analysis—developed from the 1930s to the 1970s—of the hidden social (and ecological) costs of private enterprise. Kapp's insistence that companies externalize their costs to maximize profit must be part of any meaningful engagement with today's behemoths of platform planning.⁹⁷ All too often, today's positions are still informed by an unquestioned "left accelerationism" that sees Amazon and the like as the pathway to future salvation, without recognizing that destructive extractivism is a key feature, not a bug, of tech giants.

The councilist tradition tended to be fixated on industrial labor in the "advanced" industrial world, even if authors such as Appel also insisted on non-industrial (service, intellectual) work. Images of councils from the 1920s in the context of the Cologne Progressives tend to show white male workers; this goes both for Arntz's schematic renditions (as far as these allow inferences about gender and race) and for Sander's 1927 photograph of a "workers' council"—presumably the neutered, advisory kind that was integrated into the Weimar constitution.⁹⁸ Here both anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, on the one hand, and the Bolsheviks, on the other, gave evidence of a less narrow and teleological outlook than the Dutch-German councilists. Anarchists did not subscribe to accelerationist accounts of the revolution needing an advanced industrial proletariat—and, while the Bolsheviks were Marxists, they had pulled off a revolution in a "backward," still largely agrarian country. In the 1920s, anarchists and Moscow-affiliated communists jostled for supremacy in Chinese cities, with Guangzhou known variously as the "Barcelona of the East" (for its anarcho-syndicalist presence) while hosting a short-lived "Guangzhou Soviet" during a revolution attempted by the Moscow-

affiliated Chinese Communist Party in late 1927.

Today, China looms large in the new calculation debate. If, as Felix Klopothek notes, Neurathian planning presupposes an overreaching, monstrous state, the currently most successful *Monsterstaat* holds an ambiguous fascination for today's plan enthusiasts.⁹⁹ The Chinese model certainly provides ample material for critical reflection, even if there is confusion as to the status and the success of the much-discussed Social Credit System, in particular.¹⁰⁰ Whether or not the Chinese Social Credit System currently lives up to its reputation, its potential is clear. Florian Cramer rightly notes that, "Globally implemented, all automata that provide services or goods could accept 'social credit' as payment so that this system could eventually replace traditional currencies."¹⁰¹

That this model is a centralist and surveillance-capitalist perversion of the GIC model is not difficult to see; it is not so much that money is replaced by direct calculation of socially necessary labor time, or socially necessary reproduction time, but that the ability to have access to and spend money is modulated by what is deemed socially desirable. If capitalism is marked by the universalization of the value-form, by its increasingly general penetration of life, then this seems only to exacerbate that hold through a neofeudal turn of capitalism itself. In this context, reintroduction of the councilist element of self-organization and self-constitution seems more important than ever, so that value and values can be discussed and developed from below.

In 1970, Mattick came around to the view that one would still need to create institutions that have a societal overview and exercise some degree of control.¹⁰² Thus the utopia of the council form again meets its other: the plan. With today's technology, the construction of what Morozov terms a "feedback infrastructure" for the designing of "non-markets" requires less central coordination than old models of the planned economy. We go from Neurathian planning to forms of coordination through association—without, however, turning the possible need for a higher level of central coordination into a phobic Bad Object. In 2014, the economist Daniel E. Saros presented a fairly detailed proposal for a digital socialist/councilist economy. At its heart is an online "General Catalog" in which individuals can register their needs and create "needs profiles," while in each workplace workers "form workers' councils that make decisions regarding the use-values to be produced and posted in the General Catalog."¹⁰³

In the era of Big Data, bookkeeping becomes an automated feedback infrastructure that makes centralized planning obsolete. Needs and production units are use-values that are quantified not in money but in (credit) points. If these can be considered prices of some kind, they are a different kind of price: they are timing-

specific and are articulated and realized in “registration periods,” “point allocation periods,” and “purchase periods.” As with historical models and proposals, this defetishization and socialization of the value-form attempts a revaluation of value itself. Forms of quantification continue to exist but on a different basis. Saros rightfully insists that a full-scale revolutionary transformation is required for his councilist economy to take hold. After a period in which elected socialist politicians “support and enforce legislation to protect the rights of workers’ councils” within the framework of capitalist enterprises, a turning point will be reached when capitalist property is seized and “Workers’ councils agree to only accept payment in credits, which helps to set socialist enterprises apart from capitalist enterprises. As an increasing number of use-values can only be purchased using credits, an increasing number of workers seek employment as members of workers’ councils.”¹⁰⁴

In 1970, Mattick noted the “objective impossibility of establishing genuine workers’ control of production and distribution within the market economy”—even in a socialist guise, such as Yugoslavia’s. “Operating in a competitive market economy, the Yugoslav workers have to exploit themselves as if they were exploited by capitalists.”¹⁰⁵ This would seem to apply at least to the transitional period in Saros’s scenario—which is ultimately not so much a roadmap as a *Denkmodell* whose main virtue may be that it revitalizes a certain imaginary and makes a case for imagining and representing productive relations otherwise. However, if—as Morozov contends in reviewing Saros’s model—the case of Amazon shows that certain aspects of Saros’s plan “are already in operation” under capitalist conditions, this again raises questions about taking over technologies and structures that are built on and designed for exploitation and extraction.¹⁰⁶ While the fixation on the “cutting edge” as incubators of future planning reveals accelerationist habits in dire need of questioning, such companies do need to be engaged with. Here, a campaign such as Make Amazon Pay, organized by Progressive International with input from artist Jonas Staal, is an important corrective to the planning debate: by putting pressure on Amazon for its treatment of workers, its ecological footprint, and its tax evasion, Make Amazon Pay can be seen as an application of Kapp’s analysis of the hidden costs of capitalism. It also serves as a reminder that “actually existing” organizations such as Amazon or Walmart are part of the problem and that any potential solutions can be derived only from critical interventions and transformative appropriations.¹⁰⁷

If Staal worked on Make Amazon Pay as an anonymous “propaganda artist,” *Collectivize Facebook* is an artistic project doubling as—or mimicking—an activist campaign, authored by Staal and lawyer Jan Fermon. Revolving around



Left: Publicity image from the campaign Make Amazon Pay (2020–) organized by UNI Global Union and Progressive International, November 27, 2020. Visual identity and public intervention design by Jonas Staal in collaboration with Remco van Bladel. Photo: UNI Global Union/Progressive International.

Opposite: Jonas Staal and Jan Fermon. *Collectivize Facebook: A Pre-Trial*, 2021. Theater Rotterdam, produced by HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin. Photo: Ruben Hamelink.

a lawsuit that will be brought to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, *Collectivize Facebook* is at this point a speculative proposition above all:

Infrastructures like Facebook need to be in the public domain, owned and controlled collectively and democratically by their users. This will require creative work and thinking to develop such worldwide collective and democratic mechanisms of control. . . . It is only at that price that infrastructures like Facebook can become tools for emancipation, for the full realisation of peoples and human rights, and which can, through doing so, cease to be monstrous threats to those rights and to humanity itself. Only a collectivized Facebook—a cooperative of 2.5 billion people—can ensure that the right to self-determination is not only protected but also expanded.¹⁰⁸

What would turning Facebook into a “tool for emancipation” mean? Would the entire structure—which, again, is based on exploitation and extraction—have to be changed to the extent that it is no longer recognizable? The somewhat reformist language also raises questions. After all, “cooperatives” exist in the present, under capitalist conditions. But how would a cooperative of 2.5 billion people be organized, and how would councilist self-organization function on such a scale—or against such a scale? This would indeed seem to require the councils of “AI workers” that computer scientist Dan McQuillan calls for—insisting, in keeping with a long tradition, that such councils are “not a reconfiguring of representative democracy” but rather “challenge the validity of representation” and are “constitutive of a different commonality.”¹⁰⁹

For both Staal and McQuillan, the Kurdish revolution in Rojava is a crucial model. Staal has designed a parliament for Rojava, and McQuillan argues that

The potential of council organisation for both community life and economic activity has been put into practice in the autonomous zone of Rojava . . . through local meetings, general conventions, and councils. One of the most striking aspects has been the self-organisation of women in this system—working both within their own structures and having joint leadership of administrative and economic councils at all levels of the federal system.¹¹⁰

Could Rojava’s democratic confederalism provide pointers for the socialization of corporations? And, beyond the Rojava form of gender parity: would feminist



critiques and practices not have to be an integral part of remaking a platform that has its roots in Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard student days and his sexist and invasive "hot or not" site FaceMash? Could councilist structures be shaped using the blockchain, as a decentralized autonomous organization, even though the ideological presuppositions of right-wing technolibertarianism are baked into its digital DNA?¹¹¹

While emphasizing the transformative potential of councils is important, the pesky issue of representation has a habit of returning. Who gets to participate in such councils? The employees? The users? What about all the unglamorous and unhealthy "upstream" work that goes into the creation and maintenance of a tech platform—much of which occurs in the Global South?¹¹² *Collectivize Facebook* does not answer such questions or even ask them in explicit terms, but it helps to make them thinkable—and provides a platform for their agonistic discussion and elaboration. As we wait for utopia to concretize, the project to transvaluate value and reshape social form is only getting more urgent.

Notes

1. Johanna Bockman places the neoclassical-socialist positions in the calculation debate in a wider historical context in “Neoclassical Economics and Socialism: From the Beginnings to 1953,” in *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 17–49.

2. Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism*, 6.

3. H.D. Dickinson, a British advocate of socialist planning, quoted by Bockman, “Neoclassical Economics and Socialism,” 33.

4. Key contributions to the debate 2.0 include Evgeny Morozov, “Digital Socialism? The Calculation Debate in the Age of Big Data,” *New Left Review*, n.s., no. 117 (March–June 2019): 33–67; and Timo Daum and Sabine Nuss, eds., *Die unsichtbare Hand des Plans: Koordination und Kalkül im digitalen Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Dietz, 2021).

5. Friedrich A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945), in *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 77–91.

6. Morozov, 45–46.

7. Morozov, 45.

8. Morozov, 45–46.

9. Morozov, 48.

10. Morozov, 47–48. However, the focus on price and (or as) information already features in Hayek’s 1930s work. See Friedrich A. Hayek, *Monetary Theory and the Trade Cycle* (1933), in *Prices and Production and Other Works: F.A. Hayek on Money, the Business Cycle, and the Gold Standard*, ed. Joseph T. Salerno (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 1–130; and Friedrich A. Hayek, “Economics and Knowledge” (1937), in *Individualism and Economic Order*, 33–56. The latter represents a radicalization in its emphasis on the role of ignorance in the setting and understanding of prices and what goes into them. On this, see Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 83.

11. Walther Rathenau, *Von kommenden Dingen* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1918), esp. 141–145; and Vladimir Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917), ch. III, sec. 3, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch03.htm>.

12. Adolf A. Berle Jr. and Gardiner C. Means, *The Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 8. Rathenau’s *Von kommenden Dingen* is referenced on page 252. See Grégoire Chamayou, *La société ingouvernable: Une généalogie du libéralisme autoritaire* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2018), 41–47; available in English translation as *The Ungovernable Society: A Genealogy of Authoritarian Liberalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018). Arguably, Berle and Means arrived at their diagnosis well after the fact. Building on their “pioneering work” and that of authors such as James Burnham, Alfred D. Chandler developed a much more historically nuanced analysis, tracing the transformations of the corporation and the rise of middle and top management in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 5.

13. James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World* (New York: John Day, 1941). For an assessment of Burnham’s book that is scathing in its criticism of his simplistic historic narrative and its presentation of “the managerial class” as a new sovereign succeeding the feudal lords of the Middle Ages and the modern capitalists, see Otto Neurath, “Planning or Managerial Revolution” (1943), in *Economic Writings: Selections, 1904–1945*, Vienna Circle

Collection, vol. 23, ed. Thomas E. Uebel and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004), 527–538.

14. Burnham, 131, 135.

15. Chamayou, 48.

16. See Friedrich Pollock, “State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations” (1941), in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1990), 71–94; and C.L.R. James (with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee), *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950; Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986).

17. For council-communist positions on state capitalism during the 1930s, see Philippe Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–1968)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 390–397. A key debate occurred in the pages of *Rätekorrespondenz*, no. 16/17 (May 1936).

18. Friedrich Pollock, *Automation: Materialien zur Beurteilung der ökonomischen und sozialen Folgen* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1956), 289.

19. Oskar Lange, “The Computer and the Market,” in *Socialism, Capitalism and Economic Growth: Essays Presented to Maurice Dobb*, ed. C.H. Feinstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 158.

20. Rujana Rebernjak, “From Paperwork to ‘Mechanized Administration’: Designing the Bureaucracy of Self-Management in Postwar Yugoslavia,” *Grey Room*, no. 86 (Winter 2022): 50–77.

21. On Cybersyn, see Eden Medina, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende’s Chile* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

22. Chamayou, 99.

23. Chamayou, 91.

24. Chamayou, 215–224.

25. Slobodian, 55–120.

26. Medina; and Rebernjak.

27. See Paul Mattick, “Workers’ Control” (1967), in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* (London: Merlin Press, 2007), 227–228.

28. Oskar Negt, “50 Jahre Institut für Sozialforschung,” (unauthorized) transcript of lecture at the University of Frankfurt, 4 July 1974, in Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Kritische Theorie und Marxismus* (The Hague: Rotdruck, 1974), 119.

29. Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). For Friedland’s use of this term, see esp. 6, 249, 253, 256.

30. See Emmanuel Sieyès, “Bases de l’ordre social (an III),” in Pasquale Pasquino, *Sieyès et l’invention de la constitution en France* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998), 181–191, esp. 185. See also Friedland, 155–160.

31. It should be noted that the French Estates General, as a form of feudal corporational representation in which the king was joined by delegates of the three feudal estates, had been suspended under absolutism. Friedland, 29–51.

32. Adam Müller, “Vom Gedankenfrieden in Deutschland,” in *Deutsche Staats-Anzeigen*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Voss’sche Buchhandlung, 1816), 10. Against the “random majorities” created by parliamentary elections, Müller insists that “our Volk” demands “the ancient German Landstandschaft,” or the right of feudal lords to represent their own interests before the diet or Landtag. They can do this not because they have received a certain number of votes but because of their place in the orga-

nic and hierarchical structure of feudal society, which makes them *truly* representative.

33. Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 231.

34. Beecher, 231.

35. Karl Marx, “On *The Jewish Question*” (1844), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>.

36. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France: The Third Address* (May 1871), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm>.

37. Marx, *The Civil War in France*.

38. The Zentralrat’s name notwithstanding, the German state was at no point officially called the “Deutsche Sozialistische Republik.”

39. The most elaborate and detailed history of Dutch and German “left communism” is Bourrinet. For a more condensed yet highly insightful account, see Felix Klopothek, *Rätekommunismus: Geschichte—Theorie* (Stuttgart: Schmetterling Verlag, 2021).

40. See Klopothek, 66–75.

41. The fact that the AAU-E did not want to lead or organize this process, since doing so would have put them in the hated position of Leninist professional revolutionaries, was something of a hindrance—as was the tendency of some hyperspontaneist factions to disparage any kind of organization altogether.

42. Bourrinet, 177–225.

43. The Comintern’s Second World Congress, held in Moscow in the summer of 1920, was a turning point. Rühle became deeply concerned by what he saw of “Soviet” society, and Lenin presented other German left-wing delegates (Jan Appel, Franz Jung, and Hermann Knüfken) with the manuscript of his anti-Pannekoek tract. See Bourrinet, 202–207.

44. Or, as Mattick would later dryly note, “After 1923 the German ‘ultra-left’ movement ceased to be a serious political factor in the German labor movement.” Paul Mattick, “Anti-Bolshevist Communism in Germany” (1947), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1947/germany.htm>.

45. Situationist International, “Reform and Counter-reform in Bureaucratic Power,” *Internationale situationniste*, no. 12 (September 1969), <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/reform.html>.

46. Occupation Committee of the People’s Free Sorbonne University, telegram to the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party, Gate of Celestial Peace, Peking, 17 May 1968, <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/telegrams.html>; translation slightly modified.

47. “Workers’ Councils, Cornelius Castoriadis and the SI,” *NOT BORED!*, no. 26 (1996), <http://www.notbored.org/councils.html>.

48. See Klopothek, 228; and “Bring Out Your Dead,” *Endnotes*, no. 1 (October 2008), <https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/bring-out-your-dead>.

49. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, collection “Documentatie Sociale Bewegingen” (CSD), folder 466. In December, the action was reenacted by a group with a somewhat different composition.

50. “Toller Action—Revolutie is geen theater 1969 (Revolution Is No Theatre),” in *ART–ACTION–ACADEMIA: Social and Technical Context of Events and Collaborations by Tjebbe van Tijen 1966–2006*, Imaginary Museum, http://imaginarymuseum.org/imp_archive/AAA/index.html#15.

51. “Toller Action.”

52. Franz W. Seiwert, “Schema des Rätesystems,” *a bis z* 3, no. 27 (September 1932): 107. Seiwert’s diagram has a precedent in the “Schematische Darstellung eines rein proletarischen Rätesystems,” in Karl Korsch, *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte* (1922; Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 112. At the top of Korsch’s pyramid is the national *Reichswirtschaftsrat* rather than Seiwert’s global *Weltwirtschaftsrat*, and there are other differences, while key structural features are shared.

53. Bourrinet, 303–310. For a look back on the CIK, see Anton Pannekoek, “The Crisis in Socialist Theory: The ‘Group of International Communists’ in Holland” (1947), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1947/gik.htm>; and Bourrinet, 303–310.

54. “Antwort der GIKH,” *Rätekorrespondenz*, no. 16/17 (May 1936): 27.

55. For an online archive of the *Rätekorrespondenz*, see Antonie Pannekoek Archives, <http://aaap.be/Pages/R%C3%A4tekorrespondenz-GIK.html>. The *International Council Correspondence* is archived at Libcom.org, <https://libcom.org/article/international-council-correspondence-united-workers-party-america>.

56. For the text, see Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten [Jan Appel], *Grundprinzipien kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung* (1930), Antonie Pannekoek Archives, <https://aaap.be/Pages/Transition-de-Fundamental-Principles-1930.html>; for the English translation, Jan Appel, *The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*, trans. Mike Baker, Antonie Pannekoek Archives, <https://aaap.be/Pages/Transition-en-Fundamental-Principles-1930.html>. See also Appel’s biographical page, “Jan Appel (1890–1985),” Antonie Pannekoek Archives, last updated 8 April 2022, <https://aaap.be/Pages/Jan-Appel.html>.

57. Klopothek, 106. More generally, see Klopothek’s entire chapter on the *Grundprinzipien*, 98–121, with its cogent and incisive analysis of the text and its propositions.

58. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit: Zur Theorie der gesellschaftlichen Synthesis* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 123–173; and Anselm Jappe, “Sohn-Rethel and the Origin of ‘Real Abstraction’: A Critique of Production or a Critique of Circulation?,” *Historical Materialism* 21, no. 1 (2013): 3–14.

59. David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s “Capital”* (London: Verso, 2010), 24.

60. Sohn-Rethel was firmly convinced of this, as is clear from his later comments on “May 68”: the factory occupations almost brought about a system change, and what must precede any takeover of the state is the wresting of control from the managers by workers “organized in the appropriate form [in der entsprechenden form organisiert].” Sohn-Rethel, 226.

61. Appel, *Fundamental Principles*; and Klopothek, 103–104.

62. Paul Mattick, introduction (1970) to Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten [Jan Appel], *Grundprinzipien kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung*, trans. Jac. Johanson, Antonie Pannekoek Archives, <http://aaap.be/Pages/Transition-en-Mattick-1970.html>.

63. “The foundation of ASRT [average social reproduction time] is the average social hour of labor. It is, of course, true that this category also has some validity under capitalism. Here, however, the separate and peculiar characteristics of individual use-values can find no expression in their form as commodities, since in the market the product is exchanged for money, that is to say changed into that universal commodity which eliminates all individual characteristics. Under communism it is ASRT which subsumes within itself all individual characteristics, those of slower and more relaxed workers, those who are more capable or less capable, those who labor either by hand or by

brain." Appel, sec. XII.

64. Karl Korsch to Paul Mattick, 22 November 1938, quoted in Klopothek, 113; and Mattick, "Introduction."

65. Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils* (1946), pt. I, sec. 7, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1947/workers-councils.htm>. Originally published pseudonymously as P. Aartsz, *De arbeidersraden*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: De Vlam, 1946).

66. Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, pt. I, sec. 4.

67. Appel, sec. VII.

68. In her book *Das Ende des Kapitalismus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2022), much discussed in the German media, journalist Ulrike Herrmann argues that the British war economy of WWII can be a model for a postgrowth ecological economy. For the debate on the question whether the Russian invasion of Ukraine is already turning Europe into a war economy, see, for instance, Thomas Fromm, Claus Hulverscheidt, and Lisa Nienhaus, "Auf in die Kriegswirtschaft?," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25–26 February 2023.

69. Anonymous [probably Jan Appel], "Die gesellschaftlich-durchschnittliche Arbeitszeit als Grundlage der kommunistische Produktion und Verteilung," *Rätekorrespondenz*, no. 10/11 (June/July 1935): 1–17, available in Antonie Pannekoek Archives, <https://aaap.be/Pages/Transition-de-1935-Die-Gesellschaftlich-Durchschnittliche-Arbeitszeit.html>. In a footnote, Appel critiques Neurath for having eyes only for production in his *Arbeitszeitrechnung* and for neglecting distribution and consumption as factors in their own right (9 n. 19).

70. Otto Neurath, "The Converse Taylor System" (1917), in *Empiricism and Sociology*, Vienna Circle Collection, vol. 1, ed. Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973), 136.

71. Neurath, "The Converse Taylor System," 137.

72. Günther Sandner, "Der Gesellschaftstechniker und die Revolution: Otto Neurath in München," in *Wissenschaft Macht Politik: Die Münchener Revolution und Räterepublik als Experimentierfeld gesellschaftspolitischer Theorien*, ed. Annette Meyer and Julia Schreiner (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 44.

73. Otto Neurath, *Wesen und Weg der Sozialisierung* (Munich: Georg D. Callwey, 1919), 7.

74. Neurath, *Wesen und Weg der Sozialisierung*, 8.

75. Otto Neurath, 1919 preface to *Through War Economy to Economy in Kind*, in *Empiricism and Sociology*, 124. Several texts on the war economy in *Through War Economy to Economy in Kind* predate WWI, having been written from 1909 to 1913 and informed by the Balkan Wars and other conflicts. Neurath's *Antike Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Leipzig: G.B. Teubner, 1909) is likewise already marked by a focus on planning.

76. Otto Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf* (Berlin: Laubsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928), 37.

77. Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf*, 38.

78. Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf*, 38.

79. Neurath, "The Converse Taylor System," 132–133. His horizon was full socialization and the transition to communism, whereas others tended toward a social-democratic "market socialism" in which socialist institutions could make economic reality approximate neoclassical models. See Bockman, "Neoclassical Economics and Socialism," 25–34.

80. Bockman, "Neoclassical Economics and Socialism," 28–29.

81. Bockman, "Neoclassical Economics and Socialism," 29.

82. Slobodian, 29–54.

83. Oliver Schlaudt, “Lenin, Castro, Bezos? Die Idee des ‘Cybersozialismus’ im Licht historischer Planungsdebatten,” in *Die unsichtbare Hand des Plans*, 45.

84. Max Haiven, *Art after Money, Money after Art* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 34.

85. Slobodian, 73–87.

86. “Neurath and Arntz” tend to be credited as a kind of duo, but Arntz worked *for* Neurath, as did others. The Neurath scholar Robin Kinross has made this point repeatedly. See, for instance, Robin Kinross, “Copyright in Isotype Work: The Claim of the Arntz Estate,” Hyphen Press, 9 November 2017, https://hyphenpress.co.uk/2017/11/09/copyright_in_isotype_work_the_claim_of_the_arntz_estate/. Kinross has rightly drawn attention to the role of Marie (Reidemeister) Neurath as the key “transformer” who translated data into visual form. See Marie Neurath and Robin Kinross, *The Transformer: Principles of Making Isotype Charts* (London: Hyphen Press, 2009). Nonetheless, Arntz made the definitive versions of the classic Isotype figures, and (co-)composed most of the more sophisticated and imaginative plates made with the system, from the atlas *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* to *Modern Man in the Making* and beyond.

87. This is blatantly clear when analyzing Isotype in relation to Neurath’s economic writings, yet this context seems to have gotten lost in most of the literature on Isotype. In his economic work, Neurath habitually stresses the need for a “universal statistics” for the economy in kind, tabulating both production and consumption in material units. For early examples, see Otto Neurath, “The Conceptual Structure of Economic Theory and Its Foundations” (1917), in *Economic Writings*, 326–328; and Otto Neurath, “A System of Socialization” (1920–1921), in *Economic Writings*, 356–357. These writings predate the development of Isotype, but later economic texts repeat points on statistics from the early writings. The section on statistics in *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf*, written in the more propagandistic tone of a communist tract, makes explicit the use of “Bildstatistik” for a worker’s movement striving for rational planning (124). In his writings dealing specifically with Isotype, Neurath tends to stress the pedagogical element of Isotype as a form of “modern visual education.” Possibly for strategic reasons, he refrains from shackling the success of Isotype to his political-economic tenets. Familiar references from the writings on economic planning return in this register, such as a focus on Egypt (a planned economy with hieroglyphics, a kind of picture-writing) and on the use of statistics in “enlightened absolutism” in the eighteenth century. Ultimately, Neurath cannot help but let the cat out of the bag: Isotype is “preparation for more incisive social planning.” Otto Neurath, “The Social and Economic Museum in Vienna” (1925), in *Empiricism and Sociology*, 223. Indeed, Isotype became the visual language of planning debates. For a case in point, see “When We Choose to Plan,” special issue, *The Survey: Graphic Number* 67, no. 11 (March 1932), with cover design (a map of the United States with Isotype columns) by Neurath and an illustrated article (“World Planning and the USA,” 621–628) that is perhaps his most complete demonstration of Isotype in the context of economic planning and “universal statistics.”

88. See, for instance, *a bis* z 2, no. 13 (January 1931); and *a bis* z 3, no. 29 (December 1932): 116. A deep dive into the historiography of the Cologne Progressives is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that, in the 1970s, pioneering studies on Seiwert, Arntz, the Cologne Progressives, and Isotype were published by art historians such as Uli Bohnen, Flip Bool, and Kees Broos, who took care to restore the political aim and meaning of some of the work in question. In contrast, the 2008 catalogue *Painting as a Weapon: Progressive Cologne 1920–33—Seiwert–Hoerle–Arntz* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig; Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008) represents a conser-

vative normalization of the Cologne Progressives. Here, politics is mostly reduced to context, providing iconography for some of the artists' prints, while their paintings take center stage as more autonomous reworkings of some of the same iconographic elements. Competent and even insightful though such a publication may be, it shores up art-historical categories and habits that are in dire need of questioning and unlearning. Similarly problematic is the tendency to celebrate Arntz as a great designer and to isolate his individual Isotype figures from the charts and Neurath's overall project—a tendency most pronounced in publications by Ed Annink and Max Bruinsma. For a critique of the latter, see Robin Kinross, "Gerd Arntz: Graphic Designer," Hyphen Press, 26 April 2011, <https://hyphenpress.co.uk/2011/04/26/gerd-arntz-graphic-designer/>; and Kinross, "Copyright in Isotype Work."

89. A photograph of a gig by Amsterdam punk band A4 (1980–1982) shows a backdrop with Arntz's *Tag der Freiheit*. The abbreviation "BO" (Betriebsorganisation) from the original has been replaced by "A4." See *Painting as a Weapon*, 5.

90. Franz W. Seiwert, *Der Schritt, der einmal getan wurde, wird nicht zurückgenommen: Schriften*, ed. Uli Bohnen and Dirk Backes (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1978). In 1983, Arntz provided a loan to keep the KKV from going bankrupt. See Letters from Bernd Kramer to Arntz, in International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Gerd Arntz archive, folder 136.

91. Otto Neurath, ed., *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft: Bildstatistisches Elementarwerk: Das Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Wien zeigt in 100 farbigen Bildtafeln* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1930).

92. See Andreas Siekmann, "The Economic Power of Public Opinion and the Public Power of Economic Opinion: Think Factories, Think Tanks and the Privatization of Power," *open!*, 16 April 2015, <https://onlineopen.org/the-economic-power-of-public-opinion-the-public-power-of-economic-opinion-slideshow>. On the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society, see Slobodian, 125–128.

93. "Andreas Siekmann: *Heads*," press release, n.d. (ca. 15 September 2021), Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, https://galeriebarbaraweiss.de/documents/429/2021_AS_Press_Release_en.pdf.

94. Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski, *People's Republic of Walmart: How the World's Biggest Corporations are Laying the Foundation for Socialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

95. Schlaudt, "Lenin, Castro, Bezos?," 50–51. See also Armin Beverungen, "Kybernetischer Kapitalismus? Amazon, algorithmisches Management und Aneignung," in *Die unsichtbare Hand des Plans*, 95–109.

96. Friends of the Classless Society, "Contours of the World Commune," *Endnotes* no. 5 (Autumn 2019): 170, <https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/contours-of-the-world-commune.pdf>; translation slightly modified.

97. Key publications are Karl W. Kapp, *Planwirtschaft und Aussenhandel* (Geneva: Georg et Cie., 1936); and K. William Kapp, *The Social Costs of Private Enterprise* (New York: Schocken, 1950). See also Schlaudt, "Lenin, Castro, Bezos?," 48; and Chamayou, 178–180.

98. The 1920 *Betriebsrätegesetz* is the context for Korsch's *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte* (1922). While Sander was less radical than the Cologne Progressives, he nonetheless had close ties with them. See the exhibition catalogue *Zeitgenossen: August Sander und die Kunstszene der 20er Jahre im Rheinland* (Cologne: SK Stiftung Kultur; Göttingen: Steidl, 2000).

99. Klopothek, 99. The otherwise excellent German theory volume *Die unsichtbare Hand des Plans* contains a troubling contribution that, while giving a valuable overview of Chinese economic policy in recent decades, remains strikingly affirmative and uncritical in its approach to Chinese

surveillance state capitalism. Sun Wei, “‘Sozialismus im Anfangsstadium’: China zwischen Plan und Markt,” in *Die Unsichtbare Hand des Plans*, 124–139.

100. For a skeptical assessment, see Vincent Brussee, “China’s Social Credit System Is Actually Quite Boring,” *Foreign Policy* online, 15 September 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/15/china-social-credit-system-authoritarian/>.

101. Florian Cramer, “Crapularity Hermeneutics: Interpretation as the Blind Spot of Analytics, Artificial Intelligence, and Other Algorithmic Producers of the Postapocalyptic Present,” in Clemens Apprich et al., *Pattern Discrimination* (Lüneburg: meson press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 39–40.

102. Mattick, “Introduction.”

103. Daniel E. Saros, *Information Technology and Socialist Construction: The End of Capital and the Transition to Socialism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 176. Morozov discusses Saros’s proposal in “Digital Socialism?,” 63–65.

104. Saros, 229.

105. Paul Mattick, “Workers’ Control” (1967), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1967/workers-control.htm>.

106. “Amazon, for instance, rewards customers with lower prices for registering their expected future needs and ‘subscribing’ to periodic deliveries of regularly consumed products; it also carefully studies product searches and the offerings of other suppliers in its own ‘general catalog’ to locate gaps in the market.” Morozov, 65. This is a rather rosy-tinted characterization of Amazon’s dealings with third-party sellers.

107. Casper Gelderblom, “Make Amazon Pay,” *Progressive International*, 27 November 2020, <https://progressive.international/wire/2020-11-26-make-amazon-pay/en>.

108. Jonas Staal, *Indictment: The People(s) vs. Facebook* (2020), http://www.jonasstaal.nl/site/assets/files/2032/collectivize_indictment_eng_de_1.pdf. See also my article “Jonas Staal: Re-Forming Representation,” *Afterall*, no. 52 (Autumn–Winter 2021–2022): 10–17, on which I’m drawing here; and T.J. Demos, *Radical Futurisms: Ecologies of Collapse, Chronopolitics, and Justice-to-Come* (London: Sternberg Press, 2023), 160–162.

109. Dan McQuillan, “Deep Bureaucracy and Autonomist AI,” in *Deserting from the Culture Wars*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Sven Lütticken (Utrecht: BAK; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020), 239.

110. McQuillan, “Deep Bureaucracy and Autonomist AI,” 240.

111. Adam Greenfield, *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2017), 169–170. See also Hito Steyerl, “Walk the Walk—Beyond Blockchain Orientalism,” in *Radical Friends: Decentralized Organizations and the Arts*, ed. Ruth Catlow and Penny Rafferty (n.p.: Torque Editions, 2022), 127–132; and James Muldoon, *Building Power to Change the World: The Political Thought of the German Council Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) and *Platform Socialism: How to Reclaim Our Digital Future from Big Tech* (London: Pluto Press, 2022). Unfortunately, I encountered Muldoon’s work, which bears on earlier sections of this article as well, just as this issue was about to go to print.

112. On this important point, see Vinit Agarwal, “Collectivize Facebook and Other Electric Dreams,” *Rosa Mercedes*, no. 2 (2020), <https://www.harun-farocki-institut.org/en/2020/05/21/collectivize-facebook-and-other-electric-dreams-2/>.