

futuribles - no. 410 - January-February 2016

The “Hacker” Ethic and the Maker Spirit: The “Hackerspace” Experience in the San Francisco Bay Area

Michel Lallement

Whereas France (and Europe in general) is failing, despite the very strong attachment of French people to the work ethic, to overcome the crisis of employment in which it has been mired for more than 30 years, this article by Michel Lallement offers a breath of fresh air on the relationship to work and the possible alternatives in this area. Drawing on a field study carried out in Californian “hackerspaces”, Lallement shows how different communities gather in sites dedicated to “making” things and even to “making things together” —new spaces of formal or informal work where individuals develop various personal or occupational projects.

Michel Lallement first describes the hacker mentality and the particular example of the “hackerspaces” of the San Francisco Bay Area (pioneers in the field), then gives us an insight into the principles and practices of the hackers, as well as the forms of social regulation they have introduced over time in these spaces, the main watchword being to work “for yourself, with others”. It would, admittedly, be utopian to imagine that these kinds of workspaces could be extended for everyone’s use —traditional companies will continue to exist— but their development sends an interesting, encouraging signal that may well spread both geographically and to a variety of sectors, both with technological change and as generations born in the digital age arrive on the labour market —people who are more disposed to work both individually and in networks.

Republican Elitism or an Elitist Republic? Social Reproduction, the Endemic Evil of French Society

Bernard Hugonnier

For some years now, a range of observers of French society have been critical if not of a certain decline in status of the middle classes, then at the very least of a greater rigidity of social reproduction (in Pierre Bourdieu’s

sense). In other words, the French educational and economic system is allegedly no longer allowing the lowliest individuals to climb the social ladder, whereas the political and economic elites are continuing to reproduce themselves, maintaining an inherited social advantage. Has social mobility stalled in France? Clearly it has, says Bernard Hugonnier, who has examined developments with regard to republican elitism in France —that is to say, has examined whether the education system enables students to join the elite by virtue of their abilities and irrespective of their social origins.

After reviewing the issue of republican elitism, its origins and the ways it can be measured (and compared with the situation in other countries), Bernard Hugonnier shows that the French education system today is extremely inequitable and that there is a high degree of social determinism in its outcomes, something the French population are increasingly aware of. Beyond the failure over equality of access to the republican elite which this analysis exposes, the article highlights the indirect consequences that ensue: loss of faith in the elites —especially the political elites— and a questioning of the genuinely democratic character of the Republic in France. Indisputably, these obstacles to social mobility are substantial threats to social cohesion. And to deal with them, Bernard Hugonnier tells us, we shall have to begin with a thoroughgoing reform of the education system.

Education: the Growing Impact of International Standards

Alain Michel

The comparative educational studies carried out by various —public or private— international bodies have led to analyses and recommendations that have had an important influence on national or sub-national education policies. This is particularly the case with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Among other things, the OECD publishes annual indicators and, every three years, the results of evaluations carried out as part of its Programme for

International Student Assessment (PISA), which has been profoundly influential in many countries. To which we should add, in the case of EU members, the studies and tools developed by the European Commission through its “Open Method of Coordination”.

In this article, Alain Michel analyses the extent to which the impact of PISA and European recommendations are leading to a certain homogenization of educational policies and curriculums (contents, objectives, modes of assessment, coordination...). He also asks how justified the criticism of the OECD is for its allegedly over-economistic vision of education, and examines the reality of the soft power that organization might be said to exert on national education policies—a power which is, admittedly, driving towards convergence, though without as yet actually standardizing educational systems.

Continuous Vocational Training in France: The Case for a Reform that Matches the Challenges

Paul Santelmann

In a crisis-ridden economic context and a period of rapid technological growth, adults—whether in employment, job-seekers or undergoing “career transition”—have faced (or will face) a growing need for training to adapt to the labour market. France isn't exempt from this phenomenon. However, as Paul Santelmann shows here, its—recently modified—system of vocational training excels neither in its ease of access nor its adaptedness to the groups with the greatest training needs. After recapping the history of adult vocational training in France, he stresses how fragmented and opaque the system is and how it suffers indirectly from the excessive priority still accorded to initial training. Comparing the French system to that of some European neighbours, Santelmann also highlights the difficulties associated with the administrative organization of training policy (local and national levels) and with the lack of attention to the ultimate goals of training for the groups concerned (workers, companies etc.). He closes by stressing the main challenges facing France in this area, calling for a substantial restructuring of the system of continuous vocational training to take account of the needs of the various (digital, technological, energy etc.) transitions under way in France. The budgetary resources exist, he says, but the issue is one of efficiency.

The Potential of the Bioeconomy: From Photosynthesis to Industry, from Innovation to Market

Claude Roy

Growing awareness of resource exhaustion and of the consequences, particularly for the climate, of our modes of consumption and production has helped remind humanity that we live in a finite world and that to make too many demands on our ecosystem is to run the risk of reaching a point of no return. To change everyone's styles of production and consumption in all countries by the end of the century is without doubt too ambitious an aim, but it is worth putting it forward and trying to equip ourselves with the tools to achieve it. The bioeconomy or “green carbon” economy is one of those tools, as Claude Roy shows in this article. It consists in exploiting the fruits of plant photosynthesis not merely for foodstuffs, but also for materials, chemical bases, fertilizers, energy etc.

Claude Roy outlines the main characteristics of the bioeconomy, particularly in France, the economic sectors it covers and their potential, particularly in terms of employment. First and foremost, he shows how it could contribute to meeting the major challenges of our world, whose finite nature we are rediscovering today. Energy conservation, a renewables-based economy and carbon sequestration—three possible “emergency exits” at the heart of the bioeconomy, so long as human beings can commit to developing their agricultural crops and forests.

Super-Daesh: A Worst-Case Scenario

Matthieu Anquez

In late 2010/early 2011, the various “Arab Springs” brought a glimmer of hope for democracy and human rights in North Africa and the Near East, but, with these developments coming to a sudden end in a number of countries (Libya, Egypt and Syria in particular), a period of instability and violence has opened up, enabling Islamist groups to prosper against a backdrop of civil war in Syria and declining government power in Iraq. In this regard, the case of Daesh is emblematic. Created in 2006 and almost unknown until 2012, this self-proclaimed Islamic State group has gradually expanded across Iraqi and Syrian territory, establishing a caliphate in the various regions conquered and becoming, partly through very vigorous media activity

and propaganda, a major regional actor, albeit a pariah organization that many states would like to see disappear.

Yet, as Matthieu Anquez shows here in this piece of political fiction, the worst-case scenario cannot be ruled out. What would happen if, for want of adequate international coordination, Daesh were, by exploiting the chaotic state of the region, to overturn the current political order and take power in Saudi Arabia, for example? In unfolding the script of such a scenario, Anquez points up the failings and weaknesses that might possibly enable it to come about. However, this foresight exercise may also serve as a warning and encourage the various regional and international actors to equip themselves to combat Daesh. Given the reactions to the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015 (which occurred after this article was accepted for publication), let us hope that it will strengthen their conviction and motivate them to act as quickly as possible.

Asylum and Immigration in Europe

Jean-François Drevet

The civil war in Syria, which has driven a large number of that country's population to emigrate, and the multiple crises flaring up all over Africa and the Middle East have further fuelled the debates on European migration policies and on attitudes toward that influx of migrants both across the union and in the different member states. For Europeans, this means finding responses by which they can reconcile their historic humanitarian values with the inherent limitations on their ability to cope with taking in and integrating these groups of people. In this article, Jean-François Drevet shows what a difficult exercise this is, not only for the Union (for example, in its relations with Turkey), but also with regard to public opinion in the various countries (less and less favourable to receiving migrants) and at the political level (particularly where the integration of Muslim communities is concerned). This column, which was written before the Paris attacks and before the ensuing debates on how to deal with "radicalized" people of foreign origin, remains wholly pertinent on these migration issues and its author cannot be accused of writing under the influence of those tragic events. ■

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Its objective is to provide its readers with a better understanding of contemporary societies dynamics, those facts, ideas and trends shaping their medium and long term possible futures.

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