

## eight hours a day.

"The next time these smart people who say there's something wrong with [the unpaid 'back-to-work' programme] go into their supermarket, they should ask themselves this simple question: when they can't find the food on the shelves, who is more important? Them, the geologist, or the person that stacked the shelf?"

Iain Duncan Smith  
*Works and Pensions Secretary.*

The context for this rather existential comment, in which the Minister for Works weighs our souls and finds that of the geologists wanting, is this:

Cait Reilly, a 24 year-old geology graduate from Birmingham, was unable to find work in her field, so, after a period, decided to apply for unemployment benefits. As part of the application, she was involuntarily enrolled in a government project called the 'back-to-work' scheme. Under the scheme, Cait was required to work as an unpaid shelf stacker for bargain store Poundland.

She interpreted this as forced labour (slavery), took the government to trial, and won in the Appeal Court — although the 'back-to-work' scheme is still running.

We must ask ourselves, what sort of civilisation condones institutionalised forced labour? Well, to be fair, Britain on the whole does not condone this behaviour. Rather, what is it about this particular situation that makes it seem acceptable?

Part of it stems from a deep-seated distrust of the poor, the unemployed, and the precarious, all of whom are painted by the media as potential "benefit cheats" and "scroungers." The evidence is clear, benefit fraud is an almost negligible concern; especially compared with corporate tax avoidance and evasion. (Amazon and Starbucks!)

We are happy to assume that the unemployed are unemployable, and that they are unwanted because they are unnecessary. From this position the burden of honesty lies with the citizen: they must justify themselves and their existence through a murky bureaucratic examination.

What are your skills? This question, which invariably strays into the candidate's personal life, allows the corporate-state to judge the validity of the candidate's being — and this constitutes the effective individualisation of the Welfare State. This is how Iain Duncan Smith can state that a shelf stacker is a more worthy use of your time on this earth than a geologist.

The skill assessment demands managerial skills of everyone, it is not necessary to have your own business in order to become an entrepreneur; one need only behave like one, adopt the same logic, attitude, ways of relating to the world. This means implementing a form of individual government, or 'care of the self', in which the individual must become their own boss — either literally, or by taking upon themselves the costs and risks that the State has externalised onto society. As with bank credit, State rights are now granted on the basis of a personal application, following review, after information on the individual's life, behaviour and modes of existence have been obtained.

This of course introduces a certain arbitrariness and chance into the process, since everything is no longer measured by a benchmark, but the whims of each examiner. When applying for a national school loan by telephone, if the applicant doesn't like the answer, they can continue to call back until they get the one they want.

### **This is the transformation of social rights into social debts.**

The claim is that we can no longer afford health, education, and these things, as a society. The unspoken sophistry is that if taxation revenue is insufficient to offset public spending, the solution is to raise, not lower, the highest tax rates, and raise wages, not reduce them to subsistence levels.

Students of the AA may find a point of reference with the architectural internship, which was the avant-garde pioneer of the neoliberal free labour market: producing 'flexible' (fireable), 'inexperienced' (free), 'employees' (drones).

In this light, Fulcrum rejects wholly the unpaid internship. It is immoral, and we discourage you from undervaluing the worth of your labour.

## work, rest and play.

"Adolescence is a recent category created according to the demands of mass consumption."

*Tiqqun*

History is peppered with unrecognised ironies. One of the more surreal examples is undoubtedly the concert held to commemorate Walt Disney World's 15th anniversary, celebrated in 1986. Surrounded by the anti-Semite's well-loved characters, depicting impossibly-shaped princesses and questionable racial stereotypes, Dolly Parton sang "Working nine to five, what a way to make a living." The irony is, of course, that the so-called eight-hour day — in which every worker is entitled to 8 hours recreation, and 8 hours rest, for every 8 hours of labour — was deeply opposed by Disney, on the grounds it weakened production. Unsurprisingly, more than 50 years after Walt's death, his company continues to be accused of human rights violations regarding working conditions in the factories that produce their merchandise.

The history of the 8-hour day really begins in Melbourne, Australia, in the summer of 1856. A group of stonemasons convinced the government that limiting the working day to 9–5 would in fact make workers more productive, since they would be well-rested, and would also allow them to pay greater attention to their 'social and moral conditions' — the slogan for the campaign was "8 hours a day: work, rest, and play." By the end of the century the movement had spread, and become more or less standard practise throughout the industrialised world.

Part of its success as a model was due to the fact that it coincided with a broader capitalist shift, from a focus on production to a focus on consumption. Although the 8-hour day reduced time spent *making*, it did increase time spent *buying*.

So it was that capitalism began its insidious creep, dominating not only the labourer's work time, but also their leisure and personal lives. We do not yet have the technology to sell products to people in their sleep, though it is doubtless forthcoming.

From this moment onward, the worker is not only a factor of production, a kind of humanoid skill-machine, but also a machine with a *lifestyle* and a way of life.

The main preoccupation of twentieth century capitalism was working out how to get people to *want* more.

The aim was to condition individuals to automatically desire, to embody their material aspirations in such a natural way that the subject no longer recognised the external source of their want. Nietzsche calls this process of internalising, and self-correcting deviations from accepted norms, as 'labour of the man on himself', or 'self-torture'. Orwell called it 'double-think'. We can call it a type of work on the self.

The process of training the self produces in the individual a certain predictability, stability, uniformity: even if we don't want to look like an architect, we will have some other identity ('creative', 'hipster', 'goth' or some such) to which we will aspire. We like certain clothes and certain items because they resemble our image of the *type of person* we want to become. This doesn't pose too much of a problem as long as we are still aspiring towards an image of our ideal personage. As long as we are still trying to cast off our shameful countryside ways and *become* the East London hipster, all is well. But once we have achieved the London Look, we are repulsed to find there are others that approximately resemble our image (though perhaps less perfectly than we do ourselves).

### **We hate to be reminded of our genericism. We cannot tolerate it.**

To paraphrase Tiqqun, the most extreme banality of the hipster is to take him/herself for an original...

By consequence, one of the major paradigms of the twenty-first century is certainly the belief that we can escape this mediocrity through the possession of singular objects (the bespoke Japanese T-shirt) or the adoption of mainstream alternative ethics (the organic hipster, the new-age hippie, etc.).

The risk of this commercialisation of the soul is that we know too well what we want in *detail* to know anything of what we want in general.



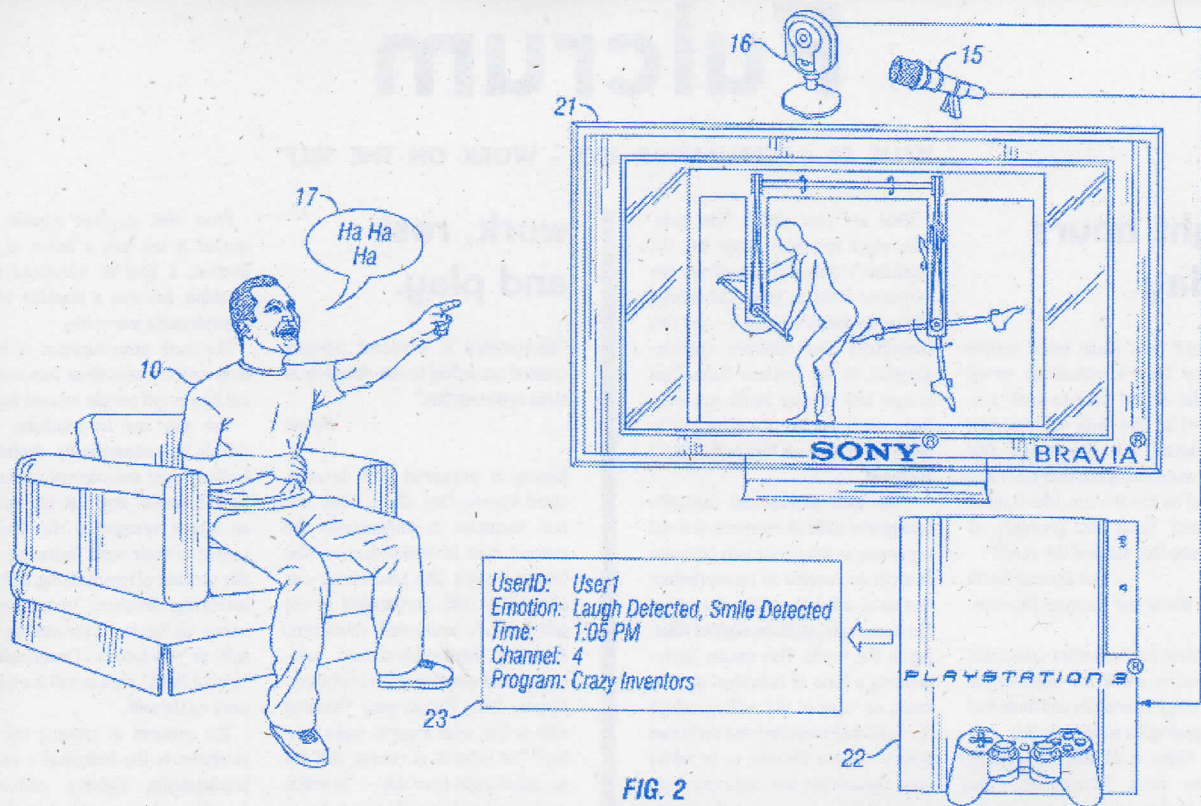
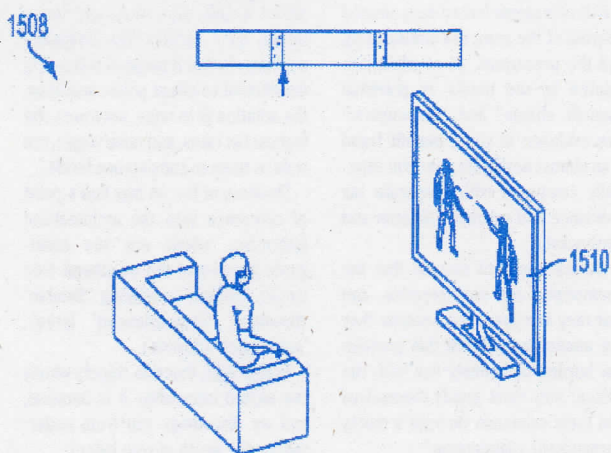
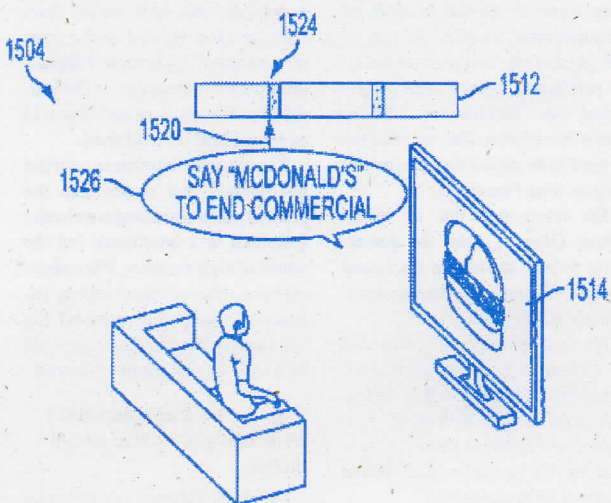
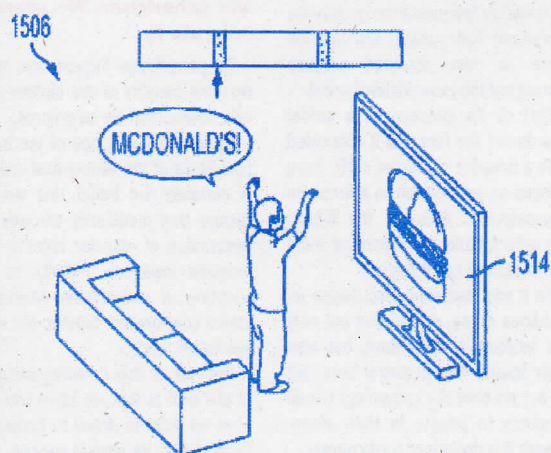
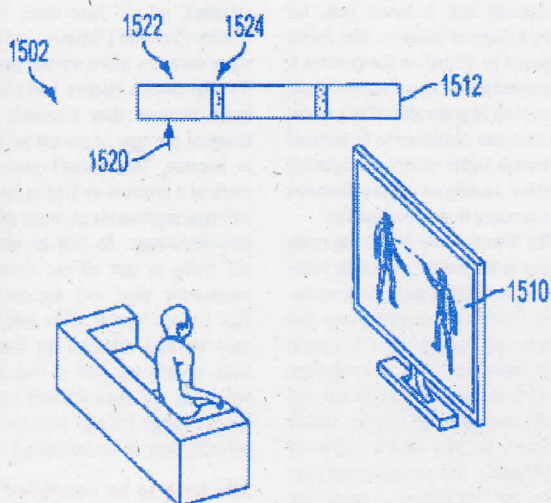


FIG. 2



Sony patents working on the self. Top: recognising and recording a viewer's emotions to customise adverts to their state of mind, Bottom: a new kind of torture. The only way to stop an advert is to let it into your soul, and shout a brand's name.