Semi-Feudal Cyber-Colonialism: Technocratic Dreamtime in Malaysia

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Part One: introduction

> 'Communication now occupies a central place in strategies whose object is to restructure our societies ... the redeployment of powers ... in the home, the school, the factory, the region, and the nation ... it has become a key element in the internationalisation of economies and cultures' (Mattelart and Mattelart 1986:xii)

This paper is a collaborative writing influenced by a number of Malaysian comrades, and initiated John Hutnyk and Elizabeth Wong through the circle of comrades working around the Suaram, Gabungan and Apcet organisations. It is these groups who have been at the forefront of struggles in Malaysia over workers' rights, migrant labour, construction issues, indigenous peoples, regional issues (east Timor, Asean), hydro-electrical dams, Government corruption, etc. This text is also based upon ongoing research into 'Science Parks' and technology in several world cities.[1]

The point of this particular study is to raise som questions, look at the specific experience of some groups (migrants, women, 'expert' workers and elites) and explore the context of contemporary organisational problems which impact upon the work of the Malaysian comrades. We hope that hrough the specificities of this particular case study of high technology development in the Malaysian situation our questions can have some more general resonances. Thus, the detail and critique offered here would need to be further contextualised around themes such as the practicalities of international solidarity (i.e. funding versus romantification of the rainforest and/or the revolutionaries), the necessity for discipline ('serious' politics versus romantic third worldism), and rigorous analysis of the contemporary international situation (class analysis rather than pomo-globalisation). We are keen to ensure that fascination-in-critique of technology does not become only an elegant exercise in saying 'gee-whiz' with a cynical frown, but rather also leads to

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[1] See also Hutnyk, John 1993 'Technocratic Dreamtime: the Advanced Technology Park for Redfern' in Watson, Sopie ed *Postmodern Cities* Dept of Architecture, University of Sydney.

intervention-in-practice and work towards liberation.

At the beginning of 1997, before the meltdown, the haze and the 'illegals', Malaysian tekno-dreamscapes reached high into the sky. Huge new airports, massive hydro-electric dams, mega shopping and apartment complexes, 2 million 'foreign' construction workers building the future, and double digit projections in the 2020 Vision.[2] Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad was only prevented by a virus from a planned promotional visit to the UK that year, but he did manage to make it to Hollywood - the dreaming schemes of hyper-modernity have been touring the world - LA, Tokyo, Berlin - and the future seems very close indeed. The 'Multimedia Super Corridor'[3] is only a construction contract away despite a few hiccups in monetary policy which have clouded the horizon.

The Koridor Raya Multimedia or Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) planned for Malaysia's cyberfuture take-off has always been an international project. In Los Angeles a cabal of the 'great minds' (New Straits Times 18.1.1997) met with Mahathir in a specially convened 'Advisory Panel', to flesh out the flashy proposals that would transform the urban skyline - and revitalise construction industry cash flows in difficult times. The assembled great minds included CEOs and Directors of multinational corporations such as Siemens, Netscape, Motorola, Sony, Compaq, Sun, IBM and more. The Chancellor's Professor of UCLA was there, and Bill Gates was invited (though couldn't make it in the end[4]). The discussion no doubt was convivial and deals floated, negotiated, traded and made.

What was under consideration at this LA talk-fest was an integrated hi-tech development project designed to make Kuala Lumpur and surrounds - a fifteen by fifty kilometre zone south from the city - the information hub of South East Asia.[5] Trumpet headlines announced the future in the *Times*, the *Star* and the *Sun*. PM's speeches and supporting echoes from Ministers proclaimed that the MSC project would 'harmonise our entire country with the global forces shaping the information age' (Mahathir's speech in LA 14.1.1997 - from the special web page advertising the project - http://www.mdc.com.my/). Of course, harmonisation with orchestrated multinational info-corps makes for singing praises in the press. The headlines scream: 'Global Bridge to the Information Age', 'MSC immensely powerful, unique' and 'PM's Visit to US Triggers Excitement'. Big dreams indeed. Even the pop-electronic fanzine *Wired* got in on the buzz and called the project, quite favourably it seems, 'Xanadu for Nerds' (Greenwald, issue 5.08 August 1997).

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[2] The 2020 Vision was Prime Minister Mahathir's booster theme for working towards 'developed nation status' by the year 2020. As we relate blow, this has been 'delayed'.

[3] Technopolis, Science Park, Technology City. If you haven't had any contact with the myriad carbuncle growths that have begun to fester alongside urban living spaces and so many universities world-wide, and Malaysia seems far away, maybe now is the time to be concerned about hi-tech imperialism, compradore elites and dodgy overseas partnerships. A 'multimedia super corridor is: ... or as described by one Malaysian comrade: the 'multimedia super curry-puff'.

[4] Gates announced in March 1998 that he will set up his 'Asian' Microsoft operation in Hyderabad, India.

[5] The Dream: The seven Flagship Applications of the MSC are Electronic Government, Smart Schools, Multi-Purpose Cards, Telemedicine, R&D Clusters, Borderless Marketing and World-wide Manufacturing Webs. The first four Flagship Applications – Electronic Government, Smart Schools, Multi-Purpose Cards, Telemedicine -- are categorised under 'Multimedia Development', while the other three are categorised under 'Multimedia Environment'. Learn to like it.

But in the context of Malaysia's present 'standing' in the international marketplace, and in elation to determined priorities and prospects for the peoples of Malaysia, what exactly is to be in this Multimedia Super Corridor? what are the serious prospects for its success? and by what criteria should it be assessed? We want to address these questions from several perpectives critical of the good news propaganda of the proposal itself. The promotional material, as can be expected, does not spare the hype:

> 'Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) is a bold initiative - a regional launch site for companies developing or using leading multimedia technologies. Aiming to revolutionise how the world does business, the MSC will unlock multimedia's full potential by integrating ground-breaking cyberlaws and outstanding information infrastructure in an attractive physical environment.' (Webpage)

The key parts of the proposal include a series of research and development 'clusters', basically science labs and info-technology factories, located near a new airport and a 'cyber-city' including state of the art condos, shopping complexes and transportation facilities, in a secure (everyone must carry an electronic 'National Multipurpose identity Card') and 'attractive' garden city. Telemedicine, Electronic Government and full ('uncensored') internet connectivity are also touted. All this overseen by the twin Advisory bodies of the Multimedia Development Corporation - they put up the web site - and the Advisory Panel of expert international 'great minds'.

Why did the first MSC promotion meeting take place in Beverly Hills? Well, obviously the internet and international connectivity of the grand scale to attract the likes of Gates (Microsoft) and Gerstner (IBM) is not yet readily available in Kuala Lumpur itself. Similarly, Mahathir went direct from LA to Japan for another parallel hi-level corporate luncheon. The point is to attract investment, or rather tenants, for the research laboratories that will be built. One does not want an empty corridor, so one travels to where the clients are. An open invitation.

But what is the invitation to? The development of Science City ventures such as this is not a new idea, though it has become something of a craze since the first versions of the concept of integrated science city living was spawned out of the heads of the planners at Japan's MITI. Engineering new Silicon Valleys has become the grand vision of subsequent planners from 'Silicon Glen' in Scotland, to the Multi-function Polis in Adelaide. Not always successfully, the more than 300 plus of such ventures compete for relatively rare technology research pay-offs, as the cutting edge of such research is closely guarded and nurtured by the wealthy mega-corps. In this context, success of a Science City is initially about confidence - the importance of hype. Here, the future can seem very fragile indeed. From the beginning of the year when The Prime Minister was talking up the '2020 Vision' vision with super conferences in Hollywood, to the CNN televised roller-coaster of the virtual market stock exchange troubles, it's been a dynamic time for futures in Malaysia.

The 2020 Vision 'has been delayed', Mahathir was forced to announce, as speculative capital became more tentative and the projects which formed the core of the vision of achieving 'Developed Nation status' in 23 years were put on hold. The complex repercussions of the slide of the Malaysian Ringitt and other stocks, along with

controversies over projects such as the Bakun Hydroelectric dam in Sarawak, and 'the Haze' problem afflicting the region, have clouded projections and predictions. Development and profitability seem less secure than before; the tallest building (twin towers Petronas), the biggest airport, the longest office, the undersea electricity cable and the Cyber-Malaysia Multimedia Super Corridor now all appear as costly monuments (whether completed, stalled or abandoned) to the precarious gamble of speculative development within very late capitalism. Of all the new big projects that marked Mahathir's Malaysia as the go-ahead new tiger-cub of South East Asia, only the MSC project, and related services attractive to international R&D such as the airport, have survived the imposed austerities of the currency crisis.[6] Confidence and hype require more than big buildings and upbeat reviews on CNN.

Thus, the questions that have to be asked about technological research-generated development are multiple. The first questions might include a consideration of the parameters of the new Science City fad and, in the context of world-wide restructuring, the impact on regional communities in the zones where such cities are planned. The impact upon those now employed in an increasingly narrowing and exploitative manufacturing sector, let alone those from the agricultural sector whose lands are bought up for condos etc., is likely to be profound. It is they who will soon gain part-time and casual employment as ancillary workers and service personnel in these hi-tech fantasy enclaves, and semi-standard accommodations alongside no doubt. Starting with questions about impact upon people - possibly still an unusual approach in development discussions - is worthwhile as it reminds us that what should be asked is: what does Malaysia get out of such a development? Malaysia as yet does not have the infrastructure or ready local expertise - in terms of university graduates - to fill the labs to the scale of the envisioned dreamscape, and so presumably, Malaysian employment in the corridor is to be of the service type. Well, indeed, at first a flurry of construction activity - and the concomitant exploitation of migrant labourers and subsequent racism - but in the end, jobs as cleaners and porters in the corridors of Info-Tech.

Part Two: Asian Tiger Cubs

The actual physical Multimedia Super Corridor which is the main focus of this study is not a shining new technology toy that can be taken out of the context of Malaysia's current socio-economic and political scene. Propagandists and developers would like to think of high technology in such a way, secure in the air-conditioned comfort of the Hotel Conference rooms where they resent their dinky little models of grand design and balsa-wood fantasy. The fact that these very conference rooms, the constructed models, the refreshments served to the 'guests' and the entire surrounding 'environment' of this technological dreamtime is saturated in uneven social relations is something we want to begin to unpack. The MSC is a congealed signifier of myriad of connections between 'really existing' people, albeit alienated and abstracted into

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[6] Amidst currency-crisis induced slow down of development projects, Mahathir's Government was careful not to hinder those ventures integral to the international appeal - to corporate R&D - of the MSC. Significantly, the airport development was protected from the cuts, since this is obviously designed for corporate convenience, while Cyberjaya, the electronic government experimental enclave, and Sarawak's Bakun Hydro Electrical Scheme was temporarily' shelved (though some of the already allocated contracts for the Bakun dam mean that part of the work still, absurdly, proceeds).

chart projections and rhetorics of international competitivity and so on, human all the same.

The most obvious move for a critique of the 'surrounding context' of Malaysia's planned Multimedia Super Corridor would be the 'Asian Crisis' and economic 'meltdown' so gloriously covered by the international media, in full living colour, and not without a degree of gloating from Europe and the USA. Leaders of nations supposedly great and small, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, noted, perhaps without ironically intending to spell out the competitive nature of inter-imperialist rivalry, that they 'would not turn their backs on Asia's problems', for 'we must ensure that they do not become our problems as well'. Translated into rapid-fire CNN-televised media messages at the 1998 Europe-Asia summit in London, this signalled to finance ministers in Asia that they were at the mercy of IMF directives and, as much as possible form Europe's point of view, were to be isolated as if plagued by contagion.

However, this mass media sound-bite context is not the only one in which we would want to assess the MSC. For starters, the MSC was planned well before the crisis was even a gleaming twinkle in international imperialism's eye. The Malaysian state has pursued a vigorous technological development programme, ostensibly to 'catapult' itself within the next thirty years into the fabled zone of 'developed nation status'. On the back of the Asian Tiger rhetoric of vibrant South East Asian economies, this kind of advertised ambition was accepted by many, despite the obvious enormity of the task and despite the almost equally obvious hollow hype that was the lack of substance to these proclamations(even with massive double-digit growth over many years, the chances of the Malaysian economy reaching levels equivalent to that of major European, or any other Western, powers was slim). Here its worth noting the new comprador build-and-be-damned cowboy-styles of Mahathir and his cronies, with emphasis on the speculative opportunistic nature of ventures: the world's tallest building, the longest submarine electricity cable, the empty tower blocks of condos and the jammed road system filled with Protons (the one Millionth Proton rolled off the assembly line in January 1997). Corresponding kick-backs in contracts and short-term gains went to the favoured few.[7] The mass of the population did not become 'Asian Tigers'. The glamour projects could not hide the fact of increasing immiseration, the narrow and low nutrient day-to-day existence of the hawkers, farmers and peddlers who crowded the cities and towns, the worsening economic situation in the villages and the years of repressive Governmental corruption and favouritism which leached even the limited potential of prosperity from the hands of the poor into the overseas bank account of the elite.[8] The context of the MSC includes the expanded parallel economy of food and goods hawkers, the illegal and undocumented workers, increasing sexual and other service work for many and uneven opportunities and exploitation, especially of women and 'foreigners' and those excluded under the sectarian 'bramiputra' legislation which favoured Muslim

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[7] Th scandal over the award of the prize Bakun Hydro-electrical dam project to Ekran Ltd, the company in which the Chief Minister of Sarawak's sons had substantial holdings, was only one among many (ref???)

[8] This of course is not news only in Malaysia, but follows the structure of comprador politics everywhere. What changes today is perhaps that the State is no longer only national, but also performs the role of 'promoter of increased participation in the trans-national space of valourisation' (Guattari 1996:245)

Malays over Chinese, Indian or Orang Asli (indigenous) peoples in business, university and Government service (more on this below).

How did the situation in Malaysia - and South East Asia more generally - come to the impasse where the 'crisis' could so rapidly unravel the Asian Tiger hype as it has done? It is important to remember that the foundation of the 'Asian miracle' which enabled the 'tigers', and even the 'cubs', to succeed was not some ethnic value or 'Confucian' mind-set, nor some trickle down effect of development, finally reaching some of the non-Euro-American zones, under the auspices of globalising capital. Such explanations, racist and self-serving on the part of the analysts who offer them, are disguises for the major disruption to imperialism occasioned by the mobilisations and success of post-war (second world imperialist war) national liberation movements (of course with varied degrees of achievement). That the dual deceptions of comprador betrayal on the part of opportunist elite national leaderships on the one hand. and false promises - development aid, technology transfer - swift restitution - IMF loans, DFI and structural adjustment - on the part of Capital on the other hand, does not diminish the fact that what we see played out in Asia today comes as a consequence of global struggles.[9]

Stages in the restitution of colonialism have been: - anti-Communist extermination in the immediate post-war period (See Kovel 1994) - continued resource extraction - co-option of Bandung generation - development aid, only to certain kinds of projects - from roads leading to hillside strongholds of the left, to train systems and ports to facilitate resource extraction - all presented as benefiting the people as 'development' - exploitation of cheap labour - deregulation of labour laws, or absence of labour laws - production of pleasure periphery service economies - privatisation couples with 'austerities' - trick of technology transfer promises, GATT, WTO forces 'open market' policies - West's insulation against Asian trade deficit/poverty pricing etc., - reintroduction of colonial occupations in form of UN 'peacekeeping' (Gulf, Africa, Cambodia), tourism, including 'alternative tourism' as the frot-line of commercial pentration (see Hutnyk 1996), internet advocacy, educational programmes, etc. This list could be extended a long way, but our next contention in this line of argument is that the recent 'Asian Tiger' routine was in effect a deployment of self-serving elite hype. It was the product of a confluence of necessary bluster on the part of Gung-ho development enthusiasts (in this case the comprador elite), and the opportunist specialist swagger of expat experts in the international finance and economics related subdisciplines (what we might want to call the neo-colonial administration). The complicity of Mahathir (and sons) in toadying to these 'experts' in the pay of international capital is something that can be variously documented, though as always, the relationship between the comprador elite and the administration experts is sometimes a fraught one. Not surprisingly, since they are after all representatives of the competing interests of different sections of the capitalist system, there is sometimes hostility and disagreement on principles if not in practice (the dynamic of these contradictions is most clearly evident in Mahathir's insistence that Malaysia would not need the intervention of the World Bank, as Indonesia seemed to require,

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[9] With this in mind the actions of Mahathir should be eveluated in terms which question the role of comprador managment, that consider the class formations emrgent from the dynamics of development and its derailing ...etc. Similarly, whatever may be the eventual assessment of the deviations of the Chinese leadership, for example, it is not despite the people's revolution, but rather because of it, that China is set to become a World Power capable of challenging the US economic hegmony.

because Malaysia had 'already put in place the required measures' that the World Bank would have wanted in any case[10]).

The role of experts and specialists in the pay, and also at times in 'passive' critique of Mahathir and co., is a part and parcel of the development trick that lead up to the crisis. We would want to identify a range of specialist workers and several levels of expertise implicated in the project of fitting Malaysians up for participation in the international economy and its exploitative extraction frames.[11] As a special illustrative case of the convoluted complicity of foreign experts, we take up the rhetoric of women in technology and the MSC. So often expert developmnt hype promises the advancement of the position of women through the liberating brilliance of technological advance. Parallel to the promises made to indigenous people about the viability of a market-based future (post nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyles, which were admittedly hard are to be relaced by the 'new' opportunities of waged labour) the promise to women mouthed by the likes of Mahathir and some international women's advocacy groups alike, was that new work opportunities would 'free' women from the strictures and constraints of 'traditional' oppression. It will of course be readily recognised that neither market economics of high-tech workplace jobs in themselves are liberatory when the context remains one of surplus value extraction and the fruits of advanced production only go to line the wallets of the administrative cliques. In this sense we want to make a critique of those who are concerned in cliché ways only with women's labour in relation to the MSC and electronic industrialisation in Malaysia - however much it is the case that old and restrictive 'traditional' constraints are broken when women or indigenous people enter the waged workforce, this does not necessarily lead yet to liberation, and those who may think so in a naive way should look to the ways capital finds uses and subsumes such 'nimble fingers' and exotic workers in its advertising propaganda.[12]

Part Three: Excuses

'Nimble fingers' and other such 'cultural' arguments abound: from those about the religious foundation of Japanese business practices (equivalent to the racism that suggested they became good at electronics because their workers were shorter and so

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[10] A more detailed example of the role of expat expertise in the glamour projects of Malaysia's recent 'development' might be that of the role of 'consultants' around the project to build the Bakun Hydro Electric Dam (see Hutnyk forthcoming). Bakun anthropology consltants served as agents in the corporatisation of culture, specialist advisors compromised in the Bakun project, advocating 'for' the people to get the best deal 'despite' the development, on the grounds that if they did not intervene with their expertise, somene else would make the decisions anyway - in the end their critical comments were readily ignored by the planners, who tok only those aspects of their work which suited the aims of the project, thus the anthropologists were in effect fitting people up for 'development', and because they were not interested in anything much more than 'culture' and deployed their parasitic careerist infohoard/romantic consciousness of rainforest activists who love cute Guardians of the forest...

[11] Malaysian 'development', even in the 2020 Vision, was never a simple exchange of hard work and resources for 'advanced' opportunities. Guattari notes omething of the deceitful bribery of this routine when he writes: 'it is clear that the Third World does not really "exchange" its labout and its riches for crates of Coca-Cola ... It is agressed and bled to death by the intrusion of dominant economies' (Guattari 1996:238)

[12] We would note that it seems that only when the perils of discontinuous work histories begin to effect the ntire workforce do the kind of limits and hardships experienced by migrant workers and women get noticed.

paid closer attention to what was happening on the workbench) to the suggestion that the Zapatista uprising coincided with the peasant harvest festival (rather than calculated and co-ordinated protest at the signing of the NAFTA agreement). These racisms, for example deployed by Castells (1996:180) are romantic paganism of the classic orientalist kind. It is possible to recognise that culturalist explanations of 'the East Asian economic miracle' were often simply racist ideological constructs disguising everyday exploitation. The values of Confucianism, national characteristics, wider 'family' and so 'firm' loyalties and 'Meiji' authoritarianism (all these tropes collected from Castells 1996:180) should be considered to work on the ideological level equally as 'advertising' as much as they may or may not be adequate descriptions of the world. Nimble fingered arguments proclaiming a proclivity for certain forms of capitalism would certainly be held in contempt by those earning miserably small wages for repetitive and boring work, so why would otherwise competent analysts fall for such exoticising excuses? It is not that cultural factors are without a role in East Asian capitalist development, as they are in that of Europe (at least some of what Max Weber was on about was correct [Weber 1930/1976]), but it is necessary to point out the insufficiency of explanations which do not recognise that such factors are deployed and work as mystifications and illusions, making alibis for any need to confront the role of ideas in exploitation. Here cultural 'sensibility' honed by political correctness and a few introductory anthropology lectures on relativism overcompensates for the guilt of colonisation (from slavery to sex-tourism) and produces a curious pastoralism which alibis anti-development. That such a pathology appears should be no surprise as those living off the fruits of capitalism - coffee, tea, sugar, oil - must inevitably deal with complex psychic destabilisations and invent elaborate rationalisations. The guilt manifests sometimes as a collapse of confidence and a culture of fear in regard to the project of scientific progress, and it generates the tragic phenomenon of guilty reflexivity (see Banerjea 1998:**), where the 'brave' attempt to redeem the Western project through self-critical apologetics takes up endless space in the coffee salons and other forums of polite intellectual discussion, and simultaneously makes demands upon the rest of the world to restrain its advance towards the consumptive privileges already enjoyed by the now reflexively anxious elites. This then denies the possibility, and prevents in practice, the redistributive justice that people's movements strive to implement so as to redress and remove inequalities and suffering. Worse than this, at the very same time as blocking such redistributive justice across the line of the international division of labour, this guilt-fear-reflexivity is exported universally to win the hearts and minds of post-colonial intellectuals, workers of NGOs and development projects and cyber network advocated of bandwidth for all...

Our task in raising questions of this kind is not one we see as merely a critique of assumptions, a presentation of 'counter-narratives' or an exercise in anti-neo-liberal theorising. We see the need to work towards an understanding of the context of development of the MSC and like projects in the various material circumstances of the Malaysian, and international, economy, with a view to working out ways to organise for transformation and radical change. Rather than an academic exercise in understanding - which in some ways this of course is - why not also try to help resource those who organise in the sectors we mention in this critique. We see this as something worthwhile for us to attempt, and we do so instead of complaining loudly, but pointlessly, about the issues in ways that suit liberal 'interests' and only fill radical journals with groovy examples (or do we?). These questions need to be raised

alongside analysis of developments such as the MSC so as to inform decisions about solidarity, aliances, action, with whom and against whom, and for what, we fight, and so on.

At another level we are mindful of the ways a demand for information from activists in third world by liberal big International NGOs (BINGOs) and other first world internet campaigners are part and parcel of the 'development' process. [13] We sometimes despair that this process is one of normalisation of the interests and uses of 'civil society', democracy, debate and information and that our participation in critique and organising, made public in an international forum in whatever way, is also a part of the spectrum of 'expertise' that we critique in this paper. We ourselves live and work under conditions of globally rampant capitalism which manage to transmute all differences today into product. Here we have in mind easy examples of the ways stylised forms of protest can become commoditised and circulate - via media, publishers, activist networks and most recently via the internet - throughout the alternative market, which is these days as reified and alienated as almost any other (consider t-shirts with hammer and sickle symbols or cccp that were in fashion in the early nineties, the possibility of buying Zapatismo sombreros, badges, balaclavas and disposable cigarette lighters in Europe - for example already at the 1995 Madrid conference to protest the naming of the Euro). While we would note that perhaps not all 'globalisation of peoples struggles' is equally helpful in every way - for example how 'activism' unevenly helps some people feel fine, but in the end good vibes alternativism does not transmute into workers campaigns that can win resolute victories for labour, construction, illegals, women processors and forest-dwellers - we look also for allies.

Michel Foucault's various writings show how the institution of the prison, the asylum, the school, formed the normalisation of work, but the institution of the workplace itself was also very much a part of the deal. Now the normalisation of 'discontinuous work histories, flexibility, terminal outsourcing, piece-rates and other neo-liberal assembly formations, is achieved by the combined effort of the reserve army of illegal workers, service personnel, women, migrants, consultants and experts. That this normalisation proceeds through several levels of class stratification, and that it is organised increasingly through bureaucratised information networks, including the internet, is perfectly in keeping with the requirements of the restructuring of production underway in the post-oil war/post-2nd world-war/post-October Revolution period. [14] It is no accident, we would argue, that this normalisation occurs now in front

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[13] We are also cautious of being drawn into 'critical projects' by well-meaning advocates and even perhaps this book does not serve our purposes without some compromise.

[14] Guattari writes: 'permanent restructuring has become the rule of the capitalist prcess itself, and crisis, the form itself of circulation' (Guattari 1996:244-5). In the urban metropoles this process has long been underway, as Capital restructures in the hope of capturing new opportunities to profit from advances in technology innovation. But as has been shown, for example in both the context of Japan and with regard to Silicon Valley, capitalist organisation ensures that profitable R+D remains in the control of the corporate, nationally grounded, heads of industry, while manufacturing and subcontracting travel to the most amenable labour and regulation sites possible (and third world bodies). It is in the face of this realisation, perhaps, that Mahathir sees that attracting Hi Tech R&D to Malaysia has possibilities, but does not recognise the inevitabl catch. See Machado referring to: 'Japanese control over the flow of technology and the conditions under which it is to be used by their neighbours … Japanese expatriates retain control of key managerial and technical positions … [and] more direct forms of resistance to the independent technological advance of other regional states - such as dumping products that others have finally succeeded in localising, fragmentation of production processes [etc]''(Machado 1997:28).

of the portable computer screen. Notice how one is fitted now to nearly every desk. What is the compromise here? If we consider how the struggle for freedom in the period of the 'sixties' turned into the extension of free-trade (the freedom of a free fox among free chickens as Rosa Luxemburg would have said), we can see some of this normalisation at work. In the information sector, we might ask why it always seems that the production of 'content' (culture) to fit the bandwidth of the new technological revolution is subcontracted to the avant-guard Our problems with the electronic civil disobedience enthusiasts which are potential allies in work to counter the opportunist conquistadors of cyber-imperialism have to do with the ways new technologies are hyped both by advertising/marketing AND by rrrebels, thus producing the range of 'diversity' which dialectically generates a corresponding range of social(ised) uses and forms which lock us in to the limits of the technology/or co-opt the excesses

We are wary of the style romance which serves the interests of laptop activists and not political struggles, but we also consider that the alienation of social relations - which these romanticised trinket objectify in congealed form - is indeed still something that can be reclaimed via a transformatory politics of redistribution and justice that does away with expropriation and returns the benifits of development to one and all. Perhaps this is necessarily scientific and utopian!

Part Four: MSC workplace

But, after all, who will be the hi-tech workers in the Multimedia Super Corridor? A layer of technocrats and experts will need to be recruited, from in part the expat Malaysian elites schooled in the salons of Stanford, MIT, London and Manchester, but in large part, at least in the first phases, the already existing personnel of the multinational infocorps that are invited to 'relocate' will provide staff for the most important posts. This layer of imported workers will have expat lives and an expat status which is not far from the old 'colonial career' that has always been the hallmark of business empires under imperialism. These appointments will have several corresponding run-on effects. In this context consideration of the impact of recent technological innovation in the old metropoles upon those now engaged in the (neo)colonial manufacturing enclaves and the Special Economic Zones etc., is required as a part of any assessment of tech-driven extension of exploitation in the 'off-shore' production sites of South East Asia. Given the range of projects abandoned in the wake of the Ringitt crisis, why is it that PM Mahathir's dream is to go for the hi-tech option instead of extending manufacturing for the local satellite regional economies (surely sales of medium level manufactured goods to ASEAN partners holds strategic economic merit)? Is the hi-tech only gambit not likely to open still further the path of super profits and speculative super exploitation? A less stark, but nevertheless important, question is why the Special Export Zone option with the tax breaks, cheap labour, low shipping excises etc. is no longer the preferred path, and is instead replaced by a risky corridor venture chasing the possibility of 'technology transfer' and rapid transit to a Bill Gates-sponsored cyber-future? The problem is that the conditions for such transfer are not quite worked out and there is nothing to really entice the key parts of such corporations to the KL Corridor, nor are the generous tax concessions, infrastructure developments and other State funded inducements

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Similar perspectives on controls managed by other capital powers, especially the USA, follow the same pattern.

calculated to lock-in technology transfer in a way that Malaysia could exploit long term.

What, and who, is the MSC for? Is it again a project to make the elites rich, and one which does not contribute, except perhaps through the vagaries of trickle-down theory and a vicarious, somewhat quixotic, reflected glory which allows the Malaysian people to take pride in Mahathir's international notoriety? Or can it be demonstrated that the old international imperial production modes are magically reversed by the MSC, rather than continued in new format? Where once jungles where cleared for plantations, where these plantations were then cleared for condos and shopping malls (which lie empty or underused) and where the manufacturing sector was geared largely for export rather than ever for use or need, can it be that the multimedia development will somehow restore productive capacity to local priorities? Is multimedia the key to local content, local uses, local needs, or even to regional variants of these same priorities - the very priorities that we have too often learnt are always second to the goal of profitability, and which seem increasingly subject to the fluctuations and constraints of international competition? The 'people's' interest in the trade in shares, the speculation on futures and the infrastructure development company extractions, are all based on some future pay-off which does not arrive, or at the least does not arrive for the majority of Malaysians. Of course there are a small few who have always benefited from exploitation of the country's economic efforts - be they the plantation owners, the condo contractors, or the new 'big project' development engineers. The problem is that instead of moving towards a more adequate mode of production, given regional and local conditions, possibilities and necessities, those setting the direction of economic activity in Malaysia seem to favour older selective benefit structures and priorities. There is no indication that a leap forward into the MSC is likely to disrupt existing feudal discrepancies of income, lifestyle or quality of life. Here the contradiction is the same one as that between colonial masters and peasant labour, such that we might name as semi-feudal, cyber-colonial that situation where the most advanced technological capacities will benefit old social hierarchic formations which refuse to budge.

Part Five: Assignment 1. List the contextual conditions:

Analysis of recent capitalist development on a global scale usually turns around several abstract and hugely general themes. A careening list cannot be avoided: technological changes in the last thirty years related to communications, but in the context of massive technological advance since the 1939-45 imperial war; Financial deregulation, massive financial flows, attacks on protectionism, flight capital; investment money boom after the 1970s oil crisis; the role of the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank/IMF - interventions to boost 'export led growth' for third world nations (by 'getting the price right', i.e., by making it low, by removing investment controls, halting public expenditure and development of Free Trade Zones); transnationalisation of corporate bodies, of executive class, of multinational structure, intra-industry trade; just-in-time production and tax and cost minimisation in FTZ's; world-wide organisation of commercial communications, including transportation, labour flows (unprecedented population movements for several reasons, by scale if not always in horror, as significant as the slave trade, indentured

labour and 'black-birding' of previous centuries); Trade blocks, NAFTA, Europe, ASEAN, APEC; GATT, debate over intellectual property (US wants freeing up, Europe wants to protect its chemical and industrial patents) and removal of trade related investment measures (i.e., local content restrictions).

Alongside these general trends, matters with perhaps greater immediate impact on peoples' daily lives: commodification - everything made, advertised and experienced as a lifestyle choice, for a price; user-pays, so that everything, even education, is a cost born by the consumer, never the company or the state; segmentation of the labour market - divisions into high tech alpha workers and low-tech service sectors; multiskilling, multi-careers, multi flexibility, and redundancies; increasing sessionalisation, part-time or piece rate labour, out work, home-work, post-Fordist sweatshops (co-ordinated by computer); winding back, or abolition, of Welfare measures, impossible dole queues, demonisation of 'Welfare cheats'; market niche-ification, the segmentation of the social, celebration of difference, importance of 'ethnicity' and 'identity' (how much are these means of reproducing the worker without cost to capital? Note how women and 'ethnic' family structures provide unpaid childcare, home support etc.); hype of the promised 'recovery', fantasy scorecard spectatorship of the Dow Jones stock index on the nightly news; disappearance of 'issues' and contention from political debate, single-issue politics geared to the cameras; resigned apathy and cynicism in the west, allocation of idealism and nostalgia to the 'few, remote' third world insurgencies (compare this with the at least more vocal youth support of anti-colonial resistances thirty years previously); credit, debt, depression, the whole gambit of general pessimisms that are marketed and sold through popular culture (mourning for the People's Princess, worries about health, science, dangerous drug or sex fiends living next door etc.); perceived collapse of 'the Left', blind acceptance that 'there is no alternative'...

Part Six: Assignment 2. List the Players in the Koridor Raya Multimedia:

Visionaries: The praise songs don't come any more sycophantic than *Wired* Magazine stringer, and Star Trek fanatic, Jeff Greenwald's paean to the 'xanadu for nerds' dreamed up by 'Malaysia's 71-year-old prime minister', ['eminence' and 'cult figure' Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad] who 'has an astounding record of achievement in his 16-year tenure'. 'Now 'Dr. M' is focused on Vision 2020: a plan to transform Malaysia into a fully developed nation within 23 years. Jungle and rubber plantations will be converted into a gleaming technopolis, a 'Multimedia Super Corridor' linking Kuala Lumpur with an immense new international airport 30 miles to the south' (Greenwald *Wired* 5.08 August 1997 'Thinking Big')

Smoothies: One of the main architects of the MSC scheme is Japanese management consultant, Kenichi Ohmae, a former nuclear physicist, and founder of McKinsey in Tokyo. His vision is indeed broad, and at the same time flavoured with good news explanations of why nations like Malaysia must make themselves attractive to capital. In response to questions such as those about the 'sweeteners' offered in the MSC plan to attract foreign capital, he says 'In Malaysia there was no confidence that multimedia investment had a long-term future. And although Mahathir is very strongly committed to it, what happens if he goes? So Malaysia needed a 10-year timeframe (of zero taxes for new investors).' (Ohmae quote from Peter Harcher, internet).

The Malaysian Government: Under this Bill of Guarantees for the MSC, the Government of Malaysia commits to : •provide a world-class physical and information infrastructure; •allow unrestricted employment of local and foreign knowledge workers; •ensure freedom of ownership by exempting companies with MSC status from local ownership requirements; •give the freedom to source capital globally for MSC infrastructure, and the right to borrow funds globally; •provide competitive financial incentives, including no income tax for up to 10 years or an Investment Tax Allowance, and no duties on the importation of multimedia equipment; •become a regional leader in Intellectual Property Protection and Cyberlaws; •ensure no censorship of the Internet; •provide globally competitive telecommunications tariffs; •tender key MSC infrastructure contracts to leading companies willing to use the MSC as their regional hub; •provide a high-powered implementation agency to act as an effective one-stop super shop.

Processed workers: those who actually build the multimedia corridor and fantasy city. Those who clean the labs and those who work in the service sector, in the restaurants, in the apartment buildings, in the transport sector. The line-workers, the cable-layers, ditch-diggers, copper miners (insofar as the cybercity still runs through wires), the optic fibre blowers (insofar as it runs on glass), the light monitors, the carpet-layers, the cola-dispensing machine restockers, the logo-painters, corporate design staff at the level of uniform tailoring, carpark attendants, rubbish removers, rubbish collation, white paper recyclers, glorified garbage shredders of sophisticated environmental mission statements, junk mailers, home-shopping delivery agents, home shoppers, wives, children, neglected pets. In some sectors whole communities which provide support and sustenance for productive workers, adjacent reproductive workers, those without community, those with only community, displaced communities, illegal workers, illegal worker entrepreneurs, police crackdown, anti-immigration hysterics, typists of government propaganda and opportunity, cogs in the machine. Sundry otherness. The wrong side of the international division of labour set out on the threshold of he condo, expat servants of all stripes...

Returnees: The departure of Many of Malaysia's professional class to countries like Singapore, the United States and Australia is considered by some to be 'significant' in the context of the MSC dream (See Yee Ai, Star, October 6, 1997). That a potential 'elite' entrepreneurial segment of the population left Malaysia to further their studies and careers overseas when quotas limiting University places for non-bumiputras were instituted under the 'New Economic Policy' has had the consequence of positing a fabled brain-drain resource base of potential ex-Malaysian ex-pats who could be enticed back to work in the IT labs of the MSC. In any case, supposing these brainy exiles were enticed back to the MSC, what is to stop the advanced layer of such workers being poached back to the superior labs of Silicon Valley? For that matter, what is to prevent the MSC from becoming the poaching ground for future Malaysian technology-educational cohorts to be shipped to the USA?

Opportunists: The development entrepreneur Geoff Burchill, famed for association with the doomed Multi Function Polis tekno-city plan for South Australia, has secured a contract worth $6 billion to oversee the transformation of oil palm plantations into a residential 'village' which, under the auspices of the company 'Golden Hope' (who own the seafront land 50 kms 'adjacent' to the Multi Media Super Corridor location)

will provide 'auxiliary' housing for 150,000 people (Australian Financial Review, 17 Oct. 1997).[15]

Nimble-fingered women: We argue that the racist characterisation of Malay women as particularly suited to high technology process work by way of cultural conditioning, small-tasks competence and the mechanics of basket-weaving appears in barely modified form in the MSC prospectus and other documents - 'labour so easy to train' says a FIDA brochure on investment opportunities. This is the gendered version of the same stupidity that once upon a time would explain Japanese technical ascendancy in electronic goods manufacture by claiming that because the shorter Japanese worker stood closer to the workbench greater attention to detail produced superior products. The position of women in feudal structures does seem replicated in telematic times, yet explanation based upon the 'cultural ' would seem most suited to those who would occlude the political, and any talk of exploitation.

Hawkers, Illegals: What Mahathir's image manipulators want to make of Malaysia is a manicured paradise for multinationals, and so this requires a certain degree of interventionist manipulation of the workforce at several levels - intensive training to equip support staff and engineer-technicians with requisite skills, service economy provisions (requiring also the trappings of the spin-off tourist industry), intensive building programme for offices, condos, air-conditioned shopping centres, and last but not least, removal of unorganised labour and 'street clutter' in the form of vendors and other 'illegals'. The removal of street vendors is conceived along something like the same lines as the landscape gardening of the science park site, a beautification designed to appeal to the supposed streamlined elegance of Western corporate expectations (little matter that this probably miscalculates the appeal of a third world Malaysian site for Western corporations, who are in search not only of cheap labour and peripherals, but who also happily consume 'clutter' as exotica, even when the street vendors curry is too hot, or the colours too garish.

Foreign labour: Under the austerities imposed (self-imposed, but they old be little different if the IMF had been invited to manage matters) the first adjustments to the aesthetic make-up of the work force has been to remove the vendors and illegals. In a perverse way this is just about travel arrangements as the worker's visa are temporary. The free communication of freely active people is the slogan for generating the successful environment for the research and development community, but the free development of all the people does not compute in this scene. The slogan could be raised that if capital is freed for commerce, so must people be free to travel where they will. This however is one of the major dysfunctions of the MSC in the context of the 'crisis'. The 'foreign' workers brought to build such projects have now become a threat to the scheme. This has meant that one of the responses of Mahathir to the Ringitt crisis was to announce that significant numbers of foreign workers would have to be repatriated. This was not really a new call, but rather an older racist campaign

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[15] We might add a further category of opportunist here in the person of 'George': 'Billionaire George Soros, well known for his speculative plays in global currency markets, denies that his philanthropic foundation and currency speculation business are linked in an attack on Southeast Asian currencies in retaliation for Burma's admission into the region's trade group. Soros said through a spokesman that his Soros Foundations and Open Society Institute, philanthropic groups that have sought to promote democratic government in Burma and elsewhere, are distinct from Soros Fund Management, his investment group. 'There is absolutely no connection,' said Shawn Pattison, a Soros spokesman at his offices in New York.' (The Nation: Soros Denies Currency 'Retaliation' July 24, 1997

given a new excuse. For some time the Malaysian Government has perpetrated a brutal crackdown on Tamils, Bangladeshis and Indonesian workers in the Peninsula - from random stop and search leading to deportation, to a media campaign leading to resentment. This coupled with Bramiputra policies which favoured Malay ethnicity workers over Chinese and Indian Malaysian citizens makes the issue of race and opportunity a volatile one in Malaysia.[16] Nevertheless some 250, 000 of the 2 million foreign workers are expected to be deported by August of 1988, mostly Bangladeshis, Tamils and Achenese. Re 'illegals': In the context of the possibility of capital to move where it pleases, labour cannot. Reuters reported in March that:

> 'Malaysia plans to deport some 200,000 foreign workers when their permits expire in August, a government official said Wednesday. The official Bernama news agency quoted Immigration Director-General Aseh Che Mat as saying employers had been told to prepare to send back foreign workers in the ailing services and construction sectors. Malaysia estimates that some 800,000 of 2 million foreign workers in the country are illegal. Since the beginning of the year, authorities have detained more than 17,000 people who were attempting to enter the country illegally'. (Reuters March 1998)

However, some kinds of foreign workers are OK. When it comes to the glamour projects of development capitalism certain experts, expats and entrepreneurs are exempt from Mahathir's racist gaze. As the economic downturn leads to cutbacks at the MSC, its local workers, not expats, who are being entrenched. At a rather different end of the scale, with the rescheduling of the timetable for the Bakun Hydro electric scheme, it is interesting to note that Orang Ulu people have been told to be patient and sit, while Korean labour contracted to build tunnels for the dam, the British firm contracted to build new Longhouses for the resettlers, and consultants aplenty, all continue to work.[17]

At risk of further racism, Mahathir and his cronies now find themselves in a double-bind. They have invited too many low skilled construction workers in to build twin towers, airports etc., and want to get rid of them, while at the same time they want expert development and high skilled expat to arrive in numbers in the hope that the future may arrive by way of that alchemy known as 'technology transfer'. It should be no surprise that workforce recruitment takes hierarchical and politically charged forms. What matters is not so much where people see themselves, nor where they are going, but where their interests lie, and how best they can further these in co-operative self-activity. Migrant labouring may sometimes be taken as an option (as even slavery

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[16] It is worth asking to what degree Mahathir's realignment of forces towards bramiputra groups was necessary to wrest control of the state, as a separate instrument of capitalist power, from other sections of the bourgiousie? The coalition nature of Mahathir's power base would suggest that the importance of maintaining control of the state as a separate instrument of power is a key component of capital's management of the Malaysian polity. That this coalition displays marked biases towards bramiputra groups, tends to counter any expression of diversity or heterogeneity, and is resolutely communal are only some of the ironies of such a political balance - the relevant point however is that the alignment of forces enables Mahathir to use the state in the interests of the capitalist projects of his compradore elite and their transnational brethren.

[17] It would not be our contention that it is unfair that foreigners have jobs while locals have not - who after all realy wants to work so hard - but rather that the demarcations of who works and who does not are decided by factors which owe more on the one hand to abstract global determinations and to speculative and opporunist local exploitations on the other.

can be a better option than death). Where people can come together an act collectively the same spirit which abolished the slave trade can be generated to abolish the inequities of migrant labour - no immigration laws, free travel now!

The failure to mobilise around the problems of 'illegal' migrants is symptomatic of a failure of left politics and a sectarian self-centeredness that ultimately will lead to catastrophic consequences. Gudrun Klein offers what can be taken as a grim warning when she writes that in the context of right-wing racist attacks in Germany, those who claim not to be fascists are also in denial: 'And by excluding foreigners by legal measures, the 'normal' Germans can feel superior to the extremists. No physical violence is needed when the police, the border guards, and the administrations on all levels are doing 'their job'. Thus the legal 'solution' mirrors the violent 'solution'' (Klein 1997:160)

Part Seven: Women Workers[18].

It is instructive, when considering the MSC from the perspective of those likely to work there, that apart from expat experts imported by the TNCs, the likely internal employees will be a stratified and segmented grouping already identified with the not so glamorous end of electronic work in Malaysia. The specificities of this likely workforce are of some interest. Feminist studies of the impact of information technology in Malaysia often emphasise the need to consider ethnic and class differentials, and possibly for good reason given the communal flavour of much of the ruling Malaysian coalition rhetoric. Ng and Yong, for example, suggest that class and ethnicity may be more important than gender, 'the hierarchical occupational ladder prevents the majority of men and women from climbing to the top ... but it remains easier for Malays of either sex or for Chinese men. Indians are barely represented, and in fact remain at the bottom of the non-executive levels'. They go on to argue that feminist theories of work have to consider the complex interrelationship of the forces contributing to segmentation in employment and take account of how these operate in relation to specific sectors in society, rather than focusing on gender per se' (Ng and Yong 1995:184-6).

It is possible to put some detail on these broad statements. It seems clear that 'Job segregation in Malaysia is based heavily on ethnic differences and is reinforced by institutional arrangements, economic policies and the state' (Wee 1996). In a study of gender and ethnicity in the Malaysian electronics and computing industry, Wee examines the ways the make-up of the workforce was a crucial factor in attracting multinational investment to Malaysia. She shows that the Federal Industrial Development Authority of Malaysia had promoted the appeal of a cheap female labour force in order to attract foreign investors. With an optimism tragic only in its willingness to kow-tow to the investment dollar, one FIDA glossy proclaimed that 'labour rates in Malaysia are amongst the lowest in the region and *female factory workers can be hired for approximately US $1.50 a day*. The Labour force is generally English speaking and the literacy rate is extremely high ... labour so easy to train and so productive...' (Malaysia: Opportunities for European Investments, p2

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[18] Fore this discussion on women workers we have learnt from Sheila Rowbotham, and especially have a debt to Shanti Thambiah and Wee, Siu Hui, who both very generously showed and asked John to comment on their papers - this is the more formal acknowledgement of their good work.

quoted in Wee 1996, see Frobel 1977:341). Such training was easy in large part because it was brief - the tasks required being repetitive and dull. Wee reports on research done by Eden in a semiconductor plant at Senawang, where employers preferred Malay women, as the most appropriate workers in semiconductor production, because of their 'relaxed and patient demeanour, their superior manual dexterity acquired from the routine performance of household chores [a handiness easily transferable to the detailed tasks associated with integrated circuitry], their spirit of co-operativeness, and their willingness to accept supervision in conforming to the expectations of supervisors' (Eden, 1989:87).

Where much research on the 'nimble fingers' of women workers (Elson and Pearson 1981) stressed the need to consider gender factors across the international division of labour, it is also clear that difficult concepts like those of ethnicity and race, as well as class, regional origin, age, language and more importantly figure in workforce stratification. For example, under the Malaysian New Economic Plan the notorious prejudice in favour of Malay workers was enshrined by state intervention, to the detriment of workers from the Indian, Chinese and other groups. As Wee points out, the state has played a significant role in creating job segregation which is heavily based on gender and ethnic boundaries and this is especially true in the in the electronics industries: 'The electronics industry, established in 1971 with about 15,000 workers, was to comprise nearly 75 per cent of the investment by 1979. By 1986, there were over 85,000 workers employed in over seventy electronics companies, owned mainly by US or Japanese MNEs'. Of these workers some 76% were women, but in addition to this heavily gendered segmentation, an 'APHD [Asia Partnership for Human Development] survey showed that by the mid 1980s, 92.3 % of the workers were Malay, 5.6 % Indian, 1.4% Chinese and 0.7 % others. Of the young women, 95.8 % were not married and their level of education was low' (Wee 1996). (The factor of marriage is worth noting, since a strong prejudice against married women working in factories was identified in research, thus leading to active recruitment of single high school graduates who prove to be the most motivated, and conveniently childless, women. This again reinforces the age segmentation factor of the workforce). Subsequent changes to the semi-conductor market have reduced the percentage somewhat, down to 62% 1n 1990 (Ng and Yong 1995:181), but in general the pattern of increasing feminisation of the workforce, and subsequent Malay-ification of the advanced sectors is evident. Ng and Thambiah specifically report that in the information technology field in the last twenty years 'total employment doubled between 1975 and 1987 while women's share increased more than threefold during this period. Systems analysts grew fifteen fold (from 172 to 2526) while computer programmers increased thirteen-fold (from 335 to 4353) and automatic data processing and machine operators grew from 1038 to 10,709 in number within the same period (Ng and Thambiah 1997)[19]. While the share of IT work for women grows, and so extends the ethnic group segmentation across the boundaries of gender,

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[19] Ng and Thambiah provide useful summaries of the general; workforce for Malaysia: 'labour force participation rate for women presently stands at 47 percent; and although the majority of women are still at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, receive low wages and are perceived as low-skilled, the composition of the female labour is changing. The labour force participation rate of women in the 20-24 age group was 62 percent in 1993 while those with college and university education was 72 percent (Nagaraj, 1995; Jamilah, 1994)' and 'There has been a modest increase of women in the professional and technical category - from 9.4 percent in 1990 to 13.5 percent in 1995. In the private sector women comprise 24 percent of dentists, 29 percent of engineers, 27 percent of building draughtsmen and 34 percent of surgeons (Maimunah, 1995)' (Ng and Thambiah 1997).

such developments are not exactly new and can be traced to the tried and tested divide and rule policies and labour history of British colonial times - when Malays were found mostly in rural agriculture, Chinese in mining and commerce and Indians working on the rubber plantations - the reinforcement of segmentation along ethnic or race lines is not without significance in the context of years of rule by a Malay dominated, and chauvinist, Mahathir Government

In the electronic industry, even among Malay women employed in the sector, there are other stratifications to be taken into account. Ng and Yong found that for all Malay women promotion prospects were less readily available than for males, and of their respondents none were satisfied with promotion prospects, compared to 25 per cent of their male counterparts (Ng and Yong 1995:187). Of course, in the kinds of new technology jobs introduced to Malaysia what prospect for promotion is there for very many at all, since so much of the work is data input, and a portion is management of data inputers. Even in the future directed visionary optimism of 'high technology', it is not clear that projects such as the MSC development would disrupt this pattern, at best providing only one quarter (the males) of one half of all those who get work with 'prospects'. And those being only the prospect of further integration into waged drudgery. (Admittedly the fractional calculations are wrong here since more than half of the workforce may be women data inputers, 75% of Malaysian electronics industry workers are women). There have however been some opportunities offered which go beyond the 'nimble fingers' training and procurement paradigm - Ng and Yong argue that the 'structural shift of the economy from an agricultural to an industrial base' in Malaysia, along with high economic growth up until - and still beyond - the Ringitt crisis, has provoked an inevitable shortage of IT professionals and so led the government to introduce more tertiary level IT training (Ng and Yong 1995:200). Ng and Thambiah concur (not surprisingly) but also note a significant increase in the proportion of staff in the technology departments of Universities: 'entry of women into ... new technology jobs has been facilitated by the educational system which has encouraged the development of science and technology and information technology related academic programmes ... {and there is a] nearly equal ratio of female and male students and nearly equal gender ratio in academic staffs in the Faculties of Information Technology in almost all government universities' (Ng and Thambiah 1997). Whether Multinational capitalist employers will continue to find these workers as attractive as the mythic village, docile, co-operative women of the FIDA glossy remains to be seen.

Thus we do not want to let technological luddite-like scepticism about the MSC go without recognition of potential benefits. Certainly technological changes in the workplace, including the semi-conductor industry, have meant that at some levels, increases in workload have paradoxically come with increased control because of flexibility. This is so more often for other electronics and service sector employees, such as for clerks and secretaries, and must be tempered by recognition that new mechanisms of surveillance, self-monitoring, the 'flexible work-team' and 'happy company' rhetorics direct even this flexibility towards ends that do not necessarily benefit the worker. At the lower entry level of clerical work it is still the case that labour is 'slowly becoming feminized' (Ng and Yong 1995: 201), yet at the same time, because of educational opportunities, and especially in telecommunications and computing, women are taking some middle level professional and management positions, though still in far less proportion than men, and especially so in the more lucrative fields - decision making in the public sector is a preserve of Malay males,

while in the private sector it is the preserve of this elite's Chinese counterparts (Ng and Yong 1995:201). Gender segregation operates with stratification along class and ethnic lines, and Ng and Yong predict that this will continue.

So while some can conclude that in most countries the 'deployment of electronic technology has been "gender friendly"' (Banerjee 1995:233), this would not be necessarily meaningful if class, ethnicity and the specific conditions of employment (promotion, repetition, age related redundancy etc.) are considered. What does this mean? A host of other factors to be considered are then also immediately evident. It is clear that in the service industries age becomes a segmentation variable (how many elderly MacDonald's front staff are there, compared to cleaners? Similar stratification applies in telematics). The issue of age also raises that of time, and the short horizons of technology-related opportunities in conditions of flexible accumulation and so-called flight capital. Training takes time, but many of the labour-intensive assembly operations cannot include further training and promotion opportunities because the attractiveness of Malaysia as a site for such assembly requires economies of labour costs. The section of the population that can avail itself of educational opportunities and training so as to secure professional and management posts that may become available is a small elite. Women of different social strata will have different time restrictions according to the demands of domestic life - more or less liberated by dishwashing technology and contraception - it is still the case that Union activity remains a male preserve, even as it declines in many areas (Mitter 1995:7). Similarly, options for militancy for better conditions are constrained by practicalities, priorities and predicaments (Banerjee notes that overtime and nightshift is not such an easy option for Bengali women, for example 1995:245). Of course the employed - in the cases discussed by Ng and Yong, Malay women - are matched by an unemployed, the reserve army, which is therefore also segmented and stratified in terms of ethnicity, class, age etc., (indeed, increasingly the ultra-reserve army of permanently unemployed are an age segment). Let alone to consider how all of this fits with the inexorable tendency for capitalism to turn more and more aspects of life into commodity mediated forms (just look how email has made a commodity of even the very time it takes to write a letter!). The service family sustained by fast-foods, automatic laundry, domestic help etc., (even in the Malaysian condos), and the subsumption of every aspect of life to the calculated costs of reproduction - such that even community support and ethnicity becomes a calculable value.

What should we make of the warm educational optimism of Prime Minister Mahathir's pronouncement that the 'transition from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based one' [we would suggest from semi-feudalism to cyber-colonialism] calls for a 'technologically-literate, thinking workforce' (MSC speech at Nikko Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, 26 July 1997)? Such may or may not be the horizon for the women workers of Malaysia. Their experience may suggest that this is just so much hype. Ng and Thambiah leave us with a less that convinced assessment: 'Despite the hype about the new super highway, cyberspace and Internet, it is not clear whether new technology benefits certain groups while further marginalising others' (Ng and Thambiah 1997).

They continue by pointing out that 'the pervasive sweep of new technologies are changing our lives, from what we produce and consume to what we see and hear' (Ng and Thambiah 1997), and indicate that this process, effects all sectors, and does so with world-wide, if uneven, implications. It is important to recognise that the processes specified in the Malaysian situation are not disconnected with those

occurring elsewhere, even where significant differences may be discerned. However, as an example of the varied ways that transition impacts upon lives, the MSC does provide - in a way that would appeal to Castells who have called for long term evaluation of such projects in their book *Technoples of th World* (1994)[20] - a test case for thinking about the emergent 'informational age'. What we need to examine are the specific trajectories of work in transition (from semi-feudal to cyber colonial), seeing how both metaphoric-symbolic and practical-political considerations are recruited in the uneven process. Here the attractiveness of Malay women to the multinational corporate employer which might relocate to the super corridor has a dual aspect, one that can be calculated as cultural in the rhetoric of docile efficient village values, and practical-political in terms of cheap labour, efficiency (those nimble fingers again) and availability. Across these co-ordinates the intricacies of training programmes of minimal extent for data processing and semi-conductor assembly, through to more complex and extensive investments in tertiary level education, training and institutional support. To what degree the take-up of advanced educational opportunities might work to contradict the docile and cheap labour character of Malaysian workers might be considered alongside the extent to which the necessity of political coercion and repression is required to tame an underpaid and exploited low-skill workforce. The extent to which the social good of education also means that education becomes a social evil, reinforcing stratification and segmentation across several grids must also be calculated. Where cultural factors are commercialised - where specific characteristics of the workforce are sold to attract capital investment - the old demarcations that separate public and private, culture and commerce, production and consumption are blurred. To a certain degree all transition amounts to the increasing commodification of aspects of life, as more and more of the costs of reproduction are forced into obvious calculation. Perhaps the diversity entailed in segmentation according to age, region, religion, language, ethnic group, race, gender etc., is an inevitable development in the process of commodification-transition. Certainly in an arena where the manipulation of information is the basis of production - the premise of IT - then cultural factors, identities, roles and desires might be manipulated too. This would seem inevitable.

Or it is? We can think about the ways in which the capacity to work - labour power - is the crucial motor of capitalist development, and that without the capacity to work there would be no opportunity for the owner of the means of production to appropriate that surplus labour offered by the worker over and above that required to reproduce the capacity to work.[21] In circumstances where culture enhances the capacity of

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[20] This book is an informative survey and critical evaluation of some twenty or so of the most visible technology city developments. As a primer or introduction to the issues it is an invaluable resource. For anyone who may want to raise questions about research enclaves and industry-geared expansions on the horizon for KL it provides essential reading. Castells and Hall are not as sceptical as some might be, and it is clear that they are onto a bandwagon theme and have identified the new urban science developements as an important transformation in the nature of capitalist planning. Nowadays Government science boffins, starry-eyed vice-chancellors and National and State leaders all think of this as the 'only way forward for Capitalism' under conditions of global competition, slump and crisis and the ruthless restructuring of the system

[21] This is the old formula from Volume 1 Chapter I - the appropriation of surplus labour. We can think of this in terms of time - the worker is paid so as to be able to buy those things required to sustain work, the capitalist also pays for all the other necessary costs of production - this amount is replaced, in terms of added values to materials etc., in the time period of say half the working day, the rest of the day - which technically the worker would not need to work in order to reproduce life etc., - is then

labour we can see that the equation of costs necessarily draws hitherto esoteric aspects of life into the calculation.[22] A necessary part of the reproduction of labour power requires that the support and maintenance of the worker is facilitated by various social contexts, community, family, domesticity (under classical patriarchy, a wife), even entertainment, leisure etc., but this is not always so readily calculated or remunerated by the capitalist as part of the payment for using the labour capacity of labour.[23] Previously much of what enhanced the capacity of labour was not costed since the assumption of domestic support was hidden in the male wage (married rate). Community social support is also not openly declared, yet increasingly these hidden aspects are explicitly brought into commodity relations (a dialectical consequence of the feminist movement to recognise housework as work, is that it becomes work, but is no better paid - indeed, the stratification of domestic labour, including parenting, occurs with the farming out of socialisation on the part of elite families to usually illegal-immigrant badly-remunerated third-worlders, or for families of lower socio-economic status, most of us, to the crèche, community group, elderly relatives, or ad hoc friendship network. The changes here are significant - and for some a source of optimism, destroying the patriarchal heterosexist family structure).

Trading on the international division of labour is crisis-prone. No amount of hype can guarantee that multimedia will inaugurate a new round of accumulation capable of rejuvenating capitalism and pulling out of slump. Individual capitals may gain temporary respite and advantage, but the prognosis is bleak for moneybags, if not obviously good for everyone else. Though the possibility of a new round of accumulative chaos exists (chaos because it forces the next round of crisis to be still more destructive), it would seem that the multiple 'senilities' of capital (its outmoded methods, its old formulas, etc.,) prophecy only short lived gains...

Part Eight: Beneficiaries

But let us not dismiss the project of technology transmission too quickly. Questions about the criteria which would make Hi Tech City developments successful, or at least a worthwhile gamble, must be put up for discussion as Castells and Hall suggest (1994). The usual considerations here are more to do with the culture of technology

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appropriated by the boss, thus surplus labour, and via the market etc., is converted eventually into profit, the return circulation of CMC etc.,.

[22] The capitalist buys the labour capacity of the labourer for the cost of reproducing that capacity, but in the expenditure of the labourer's labour more value is produced than is needed to reproduce the capacity, and this portion is appropriated by the capitalist on the basis of having ownership of the 'means of production' - which includes the purchased labour capacity of the worker (these are of course averages - Marx is careful to point out that his is an abstracted analysis). But since the capitalist only pays an individual labourer whatever amount is required to reproduce that worker, the calculation of the cost of an individual use-value does not consider the entire costs of that reproduction. There is a built in contradiction that must set capitalist fighting one another.

[23] We might consider here the uses of ethnicity - as a kind of working experiment in modes of being within flexible capital. Ethnicity as a support facility for the reproduction of labour is particularly well suited for the requirements of flexible capitalist production methods. Admittedly a rather unproductive excess must be subsumed and controlled lest it contribute to a counter-hegemonic cultural production, but more often than not this can be achieved by the twin mechanisms of urban segregation/ghettoisation and co-option of cultural differences to the smorgasbord of entertainment/service commerce and display (cute ethnicities, trinketisation, tourism etc.). Similar arguments might be made about education, where education enhances the capacity of labour. In the context of women workers in the electronic industry of Malaysia it was the case that culture enhanced the capacity of labour, at least in the rhetoric of FIDA and some employers.

development under capitalism in general and do not account for the particularities of the international division of labour and power. Yet these aspects deserve to be thought through. Some of the questions include such generalities as: how might technological innovation be best achieved and what are the requirements for 'synergy' - the concept such projects use for optimal mix of infrastructure support, creative personnel, 'attractive' environmental factors and the 'spark' that ignites ideas and innovations? Similarly, how does one plan for creativity and the celebrated 'milieu of innovation' that are the buzzword ambitions of these sci-fi enclaves? What is the preferred mix of Government Public Sector, Private Industry and University support? What regional and historical factors come in to play in determining the suitability of such developments in either previously industrialised centres of long standing, or in newly emergent capitalist economies? How do political and economic contingencies impinge upon the long-term prospects of innovation? What are the policy requirements? (for example how restrictive are local intellectual property and patents guidelines?) Is it all just a fantasy built upon a few otherwise unpredictable successes (Silicon Valley, Cambridge, Munich)? Is technopoly a passing fad?

What then are the conditions of take-off for Mahathir's proposed dreamscape? The prospects for synergy and innovative creative hyper invention rely upon the relocation of corporate R&D which is less than likely to arrive. The 'milieu of innovation' that fuels the successful ventures of this kind does not yet seem to exist in the Malaysian plan - though there certainly is the fab idea in the proposal to build a 'cyber-versity'. The international division of labour, the agendas and opportunisms of the neo-imperialist world order, the short term interests of monopoly capital and the inability to provide a lock-on to capital and technology which may relocate to Malaysia are not, none of them, addressed in the promotional or planning literature. There are very real obstacles which would need to be solved if any technology project were to succeed in the East Asian sphere, given that Gates has said that Microsoft will not shift its 'fundamental' research outside the USA, it is not a grand prospect. The realities of the international economy do not favour such projects outside the already entrenched centres. The cost to the Malaysian state, and so therefore the public purse, is likely to be greater than that which can be recouped in the short or long term.

At the risk of inviting the wrath of the 'recalcitrant' PM, we could ask a different series of questions, ones that would be less generous, but not less plausible in their speculations: for starters, who will profit from the development of the MSC? Do Prime Minister Mahathir and his cronies, the elites and supporters of the good news propaganda in the press, have capital invested in the multimedia transnationals that may locate in the MSC corridor? If Malaysian elite capital is attached to Bill Gates' capital, then perhaps the MSC makes sense for them, if not it is just a corridor crying out (perhaps in vain) for Gates' profiteering. Or alternately, do PM Mahathir and other members of the Malaysian elite have capital tied up in the construction industry? This we know is the case from the controversy around the company Ekran and its now stalled plans to build the Bakun hydro electrical dam in Sarawak (flooding the homes of 10,000 Orang Ulu peoples, and creating more than sufficient energy to run Malaysia, as well as an additional smelter or two - see Australian corporate miner Comalco's plans to process aluminium in the region - via a bizarre undersea submarine electricity cable joining the two halves of the country). But surely those that have holdings in construction could just keep on making money out of condos, dams, hotels and roads, and so all this info and multimedia stuff is too risky

speculation? Why go for this hi-teck bizzo? Isn't building factories and warehouses for off-shore assembly and export processing profitable enough? Is the writing on the wall in that sector - and does it say build corridors not factories, the end of manufacturing profit is nigh? Or, considering the most cynical case, will this Super Corridor actually have anything in it? - or is it just a flash way of selling more construction (with corresponding bribes and kickbacks etc.)? Even if the R&D firms were to locate some of their lower level R&D in the corridor, how long would it stay - hi tech production is very short on shelf life, and very mobile in terms of set ups (I bet you the labs they made Office 97 in at Microsoft were fitted out differently than the ones for Windows 95, new partitions in the veal-fattening pens and so on, new posters on the walls, new cartoons pinned to the noticeboards). What is the prognosis for the economics of the project if even these simple questions are so obvious? Surely better analysts than us have seen that the gains are not there. What are the justifications? We suspect the recent fluctuations of the share market indicate where the problems lie - this is a virtual, rather than actual, development and 2020 is a very long way off.

Once upon a time the strategy of comprador elites was to profit primarily from State subsidised local industrialisation and development, or at best plantations and resource extraction, within their own national domains. This did at least have the benefit of advancing national and local industry, although it would be necessary to quarrel with the direction, ownership and benefits of that industry.[24] The sorry history of elite wealth extraction is second only to that perpetrated by imperialism. Subsequently, however, and largely in the face of the internationalisation of the neo-colonial capitalist market, through mergers, buy-outs and centralisation, it is more often the strategy of such elites to attach whatever capital they may have to other successful capitals - say those of a Gates - and profit from whichever short-term option, anywhere in the world, offers the best return for large mobile capitals. In this situation there is thus no lock-in to industrialisation for any particular site, and the capital

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[24] Is our suggestion that Malaysia go for regional dominance a realpolitik one, or delinking? What does it do for the struggle against MSC hegemony? The posibility of trading out of the crisis via exports has certain problems. Not everyone can do so. Simple zero sum mathematics suggests that not everyone can have a trade surplus. Malaysia already had a trade deficit of $4 billion, other Southeast Asian countries had even bigger deficits, and all will want to export their way out of trouble. With the drop of currencies, export rices are less, and so perhaps getting into the markets by undercuttting competitors is plausible, but this will not return these economies to the kind of doble-digit growth f earlier years. There are too many exporters competing for the same consumers - largely the US market, since because of protection and/or lower disposable incomes, regional markets are less accessible.

Perhaps trade deficit in some sectors might be countered in others. Several othr South East Asian states have considered the possibility of gearing up to high tech production as Chinese manufacturing expansion captures those export markets that were previously the preserve of the Asian tigers. Such gambts are also problmatic. It is not just educational levels, technology transfer and Government policy considerations (tax breaks and the like to attract tchnology firms) which are difficulties, but that the market for high tech is also not big enough to accomodate an export-led recovery for all. Recognition of this resulting in efforts at hyping 'suitability' for high tech development can go some way towards explaining Malaysia's most quixotic projects - never likely to be profitable tall biuildings, big undersea cable, large dams, MSC etc., but this is no guarantee of capturing the fabled high tech developed status. Another part of the explanation is the short term profiteering of the building magnates and cronies of Mahathir. Much more sensible would be to produce stuff that can be of use at home. Why not organise a locally led recovery, using the ntional resources for the good of the nation. This dosnot mean some kind of isolation, but the possibilities of weighting development on the side of the good of the community, rather than the dictates of the international maret, dsrves some attention. (Delinking by Samir Amin).

invested accumulates increasing capacity to exploit and appropriate wherever it can best, so that even to the detriment and cost of the citizens of any particular national elite. Increasingly it becomes necessary for comprador Governments to make local resources - people, land, power - available at the cheapest possible rates so to attract capital investment for even the shortest periods.

What factors would ensure the success of the MSC? Given that the MSC comes as a late entrant in the chase for the techno-grail, lessons for Malaysia might be drawn from the experience of other similar ventures and maybe Mahathir can profit from that experience. Maybe. From Castells and Hall (1994), it is possible to glean some criteria: the question of Government support is shown to be crucial as no such development can really succeed without considerable concessions and grants from a supportive administration. National, State and Regional Governments providing administrative and infrastructure assistance to corporate sector clients fosters an attractive environment for Capital. From the point of view of Corporate industry it is eminently agreeable that many of the associated costs and burdens of new product generation and development be facilitated under Government subsidies - and so Malaysian taxpayers' cash is thrown into the corridor leading to pearly launch vehicle of information heaven - the necessary costs of production in individual cases are here deferred onto the public purse. Similarly, the support of adjacent higher education institutions is shown to be important as a stock of researchers are thereby kept on the public payroll, and although often superseded in terms of equipment, labs and so on, as the technology city grows, the availability of university laboratories and libraries is a convenient and again public facility. This all the more so, if the researchers are mobile and contract - imported - intellectual labour as well. The scenario is fast looking like another bungled rip-off since other factors like transport, roads, tollways, vehicle pollution and land given over to car-parking, and refuelling, repairing, services, as well as the infrastructural side issues of support provision in the form of everything from legal and secretarial services, cafes, housing, shopping and recreational factors - including cleaning, nursing, child-minding and even sexual services would also become necessarily available on the new tekno estates that would serve, in order to appeal, to those that might locate on an 'attractive' science-tekno-hyper-cyber-future-city.

Splendid to see. There are many language tricks that transmute this dreamscape into a sales pitch for short term gain. Mahathir's sparkling prose notwithstanding: he said in his introductory speech that the MSC would entail 'the careful creation of a region with an environment especially crafted to meet the needs of leading edge companies seeking to reap the rewards of the Information Age in Asia', and so the prospects for the Multimedia Super Corridor look promising only to those poised to move in an make a fast buck. The corridor is just as likely to become a conduit for neo-colonial business-as-usual as it is to deliver the promises as promised. Who is going to build it if not the migrant workers that are so ill treated in Malaysia, and for that matter world-wide? Who is going to service it, if not the casual and part-time workers that are so badly remunerated, both in Malaysia and world-wide? Who... The good news keeps on coming, Mahathir emphasises the point in another well constructed turn of phrase: 'I see the MSC as a global facilitator of the Information Age, a carefully constructed mechanism to enable mutual enrichment of companies and countries using leading technologies and the borderless world'.

What needs to be done is to show clearly why it is necessary at this time for there to be an investment, both financial and ideological, in recreating the advanced centres of Western production as sites of hi-tech development in the third world. Mahathir seems to have his advisors working on solutions to just this problem, but without the support of finance or industry the project seems overwhelming. There has long been considerable evidence linking the decline of manufacturing in the metropolitan centres to the proliferation of off-shore Special Economic Zones in the third world, yet there is no evidence, indeed there are contrary indications, to suggest that advanced research and development will follow suit. With the concessions to Capital available through its own mobility, more careful analysis might have indicated the underlying necessities of what is, after all, a major reconfiguration and sell-off of an old capitalist dynamic. (Anyone can do this trick at home). The theory of crisis, in the classical Marxist sense, would allow an understanding of the development of research potential in established capitalist centres as an attempt to circumvent declining rate of profit through a new round of transformation of the means of production. The competitiveness and destructive creativity (the mergers, sell-offs, buy-outs and dismantlings) that this entails is only the outward sign of crisis. Yet this is played out from behind the strategic consoles of Gates' office in LA or that of Nobuyuki Idei (CEO, Sony) in Tokyo and not, unfortunately or what, in KL. In the Centres of Capital the process is ruthless - in what amounts to the trashing of an old mode of production and its institutional forms - and in the West we have seen, for example, the University well and truly trashed in terms of its old collegiate mode, made anew into a factory of commercial application, selling overseas education to ever increasing numbers of third world elites, at ever increasing cost, and with science parks and cities springing up alongside. From the detritus of this trashed mode of production in the West - any still viable component parts are transferred overseas - there arise new attempts, via technological innovation, to institute forms of working, of production, and of manufacture that can renew profitability, capture and deploy considerably greater proportions of surplus value, and, through dextrous and/or brutal reconfigurations of market relations, return advantage to those capitalists with the foresight and vision enough to exploit the opportunities within the crisis. Out of, for example, the old labs of the University, new ventures will appropriate what resources and knowledge can be salvaged, and will move to new labs adjacent to the old (with the old remade as mass teaching facilities for export education again) - and it is these new labs which are the technopoles of the 21st Century, located in Southern California, in the Tokyo-Osaka sprawl and along the Rhine from Frankfurt to Köln. In this context it is almost inconceivable that a few carefully worded speeches in Beverly Hills could deliver competitiveness to outpost Malaysia at this time, the MSC simply does not have the capital resources behind it to capture the central capital technologies of its dreams.

A borderless globe of profit making opportunity is not fun either for luddites or for those who see this only as another trick played across the international labour and prosperity divide. There is definitely a hype in the air, and this needs to be taken seriously, the forging ahead rhetoric envisions the prospect of development and prosperity, and the plans are up for weighty 'great minds' type discussion. Indeed, that's why there is a global Advisory Panel willing to offer advice and a 'critical' apparatus ready to do the fine tuning to introduce the momentous transformations that these tekno-dreamscapes represent. 'They broke their backs lifting Moloch to heaven' (Allen Ginsberg, Howl, 1956)... The future is going to come true.

It is of course a fundamental miscalculation to believe that investment in R&D as the MSC by TNCs will equate with advanced production. The importance of the Soros scare-mongering and the Ringitt crisis underlines the merger-buy-off-sell-off-restructuring context of capitalist speculation and accumulation today. The hype of the MSC is the planner's equivalent of the stockmarket, where money is t be made in financial speculation not primarily on production, at a time of overall investment slump and contraction (characterised as 'oversupply'). The crisis here is a cut throat scene where only those quickest and best placed to take advantage of few opportunities for exploitation (of ideas, people, markets, crisis) will not be left in the risky swamp of the Wall Street fantasy. The R&D component of capital in the MSC is at present the least profitable given slump conditions, and considering the building and infrastructure contract boom. Its worth remembering that Bill Gates makes his money by producing new versions of the same (email as old mail plus electrification, etc.), not by so many inventions of the new (whatever the hype).

The necessity of taking hard cold-blooded decisions about viability in a competitive international environment obviously leaves open the possibility that promised benefits of development will be transmuted into sacrifice and submission. The extent of concessions and subsidies not surprisingly tends towards that margin where the ratio of beneficial to detrimental consequences favours international commerce, since the viability (profitability) of relocation is already the prime condition for considering a move to the MSC in the first place. The presence of cheap techno-industrial labour at minimal cost is guaranteed by authoritarian controls on labour organisation, limitation of any public or 'civil society' discussion of worker's rights, low remuneration and willingness of Government to sacrifice generations of people to the 2020 vision of future prosperity. This is admirable, but has its costs at least in two major ways - first of all that this technology gambit is a rhetorical disguise for the profiteering of the few, secondly, that the possibility of delivering the future prosperity of hi-tech innovation requires a more open intellectual environment than the conditions of the MSC can provide (both authoritarian control in Malaysia which restricts the critical exchange of ideas necessary for innovation, and the calculated secrecy of corporate business which blocks technology transfer by patents and protection of ideas).

The issue is not simply a gamble of tax breaks and cheap labour in exchange for technology transfer (which in itself might be reasoned away as at least some sort of strategy), rather, the issue is how the interests of a very few are promoted in more than one sense by opportunities for speculative profit and windfall gain. Contracts for the MSC are lucrative, prospects for completion matter less than the deals done to start, share price offers and contract kickbacks. Here, paper companies and on-paper profits take on more seriousness than actually moving dozers. Contract lawyers do far better than the illegal labour employed on the contracts. The extent to which venture capital and short term investment speculations (including the very fly-in and prosper gambits of the Soros's of the world that Mahathir is so upset with) become more pressing than other concerns - of say, governance, education, community sentiment etc - is worrying to more than just casual outside observers. It is indicative of a general collapse of any intention, ambition (beyond profiting) or any localised capacity to direct or decide the shapes of Malaysian lives. What ends up happening is that comprador elites integrated into the flux of global hi-finance, leave a complex of haphazard high technology adventurism gridded over the same old social hierarchies

that set them up as elites in the first place. This is why the situation in Malaysia deserves the epithet 'semi-feudal, cyber colonial'. Some of the most advanced innovations and devices - such as optic fibre telecoms and multi-responder satellites - co-exist with some very old technologies indeed - the despotic lord-vassal social relations of, for example, semi-legal receptor providers, or cable-linked television feeds sold from down-linking video outlets and so forth. Families in hock to their local media landlord just so they can watch Santa Barbara and CNN.

Part Nine: Conclusion

So, with the certainty of technology transfer by no means certain; with too many concessions to participating corporations and their imported expat workers; with tax benefits legislated away from the state; with insufficient trained local operators and inadequate education infrastructure; with dubious workplace policies and philosophy, especially the myth of 'nimble fingered' women; with racial disenfranchisement and controversy; with severe limits on worker's rights and organising capacity; with a restricted civic sphere (the proposal to not censor the internet within the MSC suggests attempts to do so for the rest of Malaysian society); with a hazardous regional strategy and a perhaps quixotic war of position with electronics-capable Singapore; with no long term ties for locating capital; with a fragile political context reliant on Mahathir's charisma and no obvious succession; with attendant crises of confidence tied closely to swings in Mahathir's rhetorical jousting; with a volatile financial market which also determines market confidences, and so on... Even within its own terms of reference the MSC venture seems fraught with difficulties. Whatever the benefits that can be identified, and certainly research and development that furthers medical, engineering and technological advance can't be all bad, the greater problems as to who controls, benefits from and determines directions for the MSC seem to make other kinds of questions more important.

Clearly, even if successful, the MSC and the internet will not be sufficient to provide a utopic leap into developed status for everyone - and the deportation of 'illegals' at the first sign of financial and commercial difficulty is the indicator that the good times cannot, by this process, be distributed to all. It is clear that the need to deport the illegals so as to preserve Malaysian economic welfare leads to the conclusion that this welfare is not secure, is not for all, and the question is which section of the Malaysian people must next face a kind of internal deportation? The development adventure has been a gamble-scam of the opportunists, whose grasping frenzy for the fast buck is personal.

The temporary (welfare) and necessary (ad hoc) compliance of the varied masses of people with the developments of opportunist capitalism is no surprise. Of course we must strive to better our lives in the immediacy of the now, and this sometimes means accepting wage jobs and paying rents, however much we know this is a rip-off. It may also mean for some taking the risk of illegal work, of migrant labour, and of other alternatives. What alternatives are there? Should we not take jobs to eat when we can? Becoming an illegal does not mean a compromise, nor is it a sell-out. Its a realistic option in some circumstances - as is taking a job with the local council, with the international fast-food chain, or the R&D lab. Intentional self-immiseration does not in itself further the revolution. We are keen to move beyond lobbying for a 'new

social compromise' which would win small assistances for flexible workers - say, more childcare, transport concessions, equal (bad) wage. What is required is not just improvemnts in wages and conditions - though thee wil be welcomed - but also a transformation of the structure of this elite system, and that requires more. Here there may be a contradiction and danger of sliding back into struggle for transitional goals as be all and end all - this is called co-option of course - but this is also why the advancement of humanity is a conscious matter, a matter of worked out, theorised , intentional intelligent action - the overcoming of capital and the redistribution of wealth is not something that is ever going to be achieved by sheep.

The project of working in solidarity and unity, across differences, and in international context is already found even within the very opportunistic abstraction-hierarchy that is the condition of late capitalism - the service workers, trinket sellers, illegal migrants, diasporised travellers, adventurists and itinerants are the beginnings of a world-historical anti-capitalist movement. The struggle remains to win this movement towards its revolutionary potential (demanding abolition of border laws, passports, free transportation etc.,) and to defeat the co-option and managerialist buy-off (welfare trick) that inevitably recurs. On the one side the illegals organising against the borders, anti-racists fighting for unity and self-defence; on the other side the laptop 'radical' regulators on the internet, the adventure tourists as the frontline of expansion. Gramsci's work on organic and managerial intellectuals is worth thinking about here.

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