

Ghosts of Gorz

The Immaterial, by Andre Gorz, Seagull Books, 2010, 209 pages, ISBN 9781906497613, \$19.95

Ecologica, by Andre Gorz, Seagull Books, 2010, 185 pages, ISBN 9781906497415, \$19.95

review by R. Burke

Andre Gorz is a towering figure for socialist ecological politics. Since his death in 2007 each passing year brings startling reminders of just how far ahead he was in his thinking. Gorz managed to be both visionary and practical in his politics, a thinker who foresaw both the dangers and the opportunities of the 21st century. Two posthumously translated books of his have just been published: *The Immaterial*, in which advances in digital technology, a triumph of the capitalist system, undermine the capitalist order; and *Ecologica*, a collection of essays outlining Gorz's proposals for an ecological socialism.

The Immaterial deals with the problems forced on the capitalist world-system as a result of technological changes. Living intelligence has become the main productive force, yet it always threatens to slip from the control of the capitalist enterprise. Formalized knowledge can be translated into software, and is reproducible in unlimited quantities at negligible cost. Over time there is a tendency for it to slip into the public domain. Wealth increasingly takes an immaterial form which is harder to measure in monetary terms. In order to exploit knowledge, the capi-

sent a multiple of the cost of the 'cognitive capital' held by the mother firm."

Coupled with this is yet another problem: "the creation of an effective demand for what is produced with decreasing quantities of labor." As less and less labor is required for production, there are fewer workers to buy the actual product as better paying manufacturing jobs are replaced with lower paying service employment. Capitalism, a system in which the surplus must be re-invested in order to further grow, produces an immense surplus which increasingly cannot be invested on profitable terms. This is the reason for the increasing financialization of the economy over the last 30 years—a desperate attempt to maintain the profit system, one which relies heavily on debt and financial speculation rather than on actual productive investment. "Cognitive capital" is the crisis of capitalism, and Gorz is here prescient of the economic crisis which, at the time of this writing, is entering its fourth year.

It is here that the importance of the project of Self-Limitation of Needs—the rejection of an economy of productivism and growth—becomes highlighted as a principle of political organization. In *Ecologica*, Gorz reminds us that this did not come about as a merely utilitarian adjustment to the crisis of global warming, but rather the other way around.

In the essay "Political Ecology, Between Experimentation and Self-Limitation" he tells us that "The

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talist enterprise has to privatize it and restrict access through private licenses and copyrights. Increasingly profit becomes indistinguishable from the extraction of rent.

Gorz relates this development to the prediction Marx made in the *Grundrisse* regarding the development of automation leading to a situation where technology becomes able to create an abundance out of all proportion to the labor time which went into its production. We are now entering a period in which wealth is harder to measure in purely monetary terms. The collective knowledge of humanity now plays an ever greater role in its creation. For capitalists the problem becomes how to appropriate that wealth for their own purposes.

"Control of access is, as we shall see, a preferential form for the conversion of immaterial wealth into capital." Thus the increasing emphasis on trademarks, copyrights, intellectual property, franchising, and image. "The whole of the mother company's profits will come from the rental charges it collects from the franchisees. These charges are, in fact, monopoly rents and may repre-

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ecological movement formed long before environmental degradation and the impairment of the quality of life came to pose a threat to humanity's survival. It arose originally out of a spontaneous protest against the destruction of the culture of daily life by the economic and administrative apparatuses of power." This is the defense of nature as the defense of a lifeworld against its subjugation by the mega-

machine. That the failure to defend nature will mean the possible, if not probable, extinction of the human race only underscores the rationality of such a project. Through the collective practice of Self-Limitation, we refuse the bargain monopoly capital has offered up to us of being cogs in its perpetual motion machine of expanding profit in exchange for owning ever more things.

The highly artificial nature of such an arrangement is obvious in the large industry which exists to market and advertise the goods, essentially provoking and molding desires which otherwise would not exist. Such a system will either wreck its natural environment, or undermine the conditions of its own existence, if not both. Here Gorz reminds one of his erstwhile political opponents the Situationist International, and there are echoes of Raoul Vaneigem's declaration, in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, of a coming society of "Masters without Slaves."

Gorz shows little fear of contemplating the possibilities of new technologies, something that many on the environmental left seem reluctant to do. He specifically makes reference to what he calls "fabbers," small productive units which can make all kinds of models, along the lines of the 3-dimensional printers which are now being developed. Eschewing primitivism, Gorz sees this as presenting the opportunity of "high tech self-providing," whereby communities can provide for their own needs locally without reliance on larger scale economic units.

Calling for the elimination of the automobile, especially from cities, he foresees a time when automated taxis provide part of an urban transportation

network. His openness to new technologies is not unqualified, and he is quite critical of those advocates of artificial intelligence who call for a "post-human society," pointing out that the fact that such proposals can even be considered reveals the impending crisis of capitalism. While some might object that renewable power could never provide for the kind of high tech society Gorz contemplates, such criticisms overlook the very real possibility of such innovations as solar power satellites. (That Gorz may have been aware of such proposals is indicated by his review of Alvin Toffler's

The Third Wave in Paths to Paradise; On the Liberation from Work. Toffler briefly mentions solar power satellites in that book.) Scientists such as Michio Kaku inform us these are not only technically feasible, but that the obstacles are primarily economic. Such technologies could be potentially available by the second half of the 21st century. Too late for capitalism, but available to a socialist world-system?

Gorz continues to haunt because, though dead, he still remains our contemporary. Much that has happened in the years since his death only demonstrates the perceptiveness of his analysis. To see ghosts, one must be a visionary; failing that, one can at least read a visionary's books. Gorz was an authentic visionary of the ecological, socialist left. *Ecologica* and *The Immaterial* are a fitting tribute to his life's work.

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Chicago Spring: NATO and the 1% vs. the 99%

by Kim Scipes

By now, the news is over: NATO has come to and left Chicago. At least NATO showed. The meetings of the G-8 (Group of 8 most economically developed countries) didn't even have the heart to show: they were pulled and stuffed inside Camp David to keep them away from those "big ol' meanie protesters" who were licking their chops over a "two-fer" in Chicago.

How can we understand this? What happened? What was expected? And what does this mean for Chicago activists and possibly the Occupy Movement across the country?

First of all, why Chicago? Obviously, there's the fact that it is President Obama's adopted hometown. However, from what I can see, with all his strengths and weaknesses, Obama does not have a giant ego, or at least not one that has to be continually stroked. But, also from what I can see, his former Chief of Staff, Mayor 1% Rahm Emanuel, seems to have such an ego. Among those who supposedly know, Mayor 1% has delusions of adequacy and wants to become *el Presidente* himself. Rahm, even before he raised \$12 million for a local election

and became Mayor 1%, pressed Obama to have the meetings in Chicago. He wanted to show the world **he** was big enough to hold major international meetings in his little burg, and not have 1968 recreated on the streets.

How to do this? Well, first of all—in a City with major problems funding schools, libraries, and mental health facilities, and major unemployment, gang and crime problems—it would be a little tacky to expect Chicago taxpayers to pay for the Mayor's grandiose schemes. So, he went to the local 1%, and

eventually raised over \$36 million for a two-day meeting. Not bad. But he also begged Obama for another \$19 million from Federal funds, stupidly claiming that it wouldn't cost the taxpayers anything—as if Chicago taxpayers didn't contribute to those Federal funds!

To do this, he portrayed our little ville on the banks of Lake Michigan as being someplace nobody knew about. The G-8/NATO meetings were to let the world find out about Chicago. They were going to entice journalists to write good things about Chicago, and the hordes were going to rush to Chicago and spend massive amounts of money to support the place-based (to use Paul Street's nice term) section of the 1%. Well, since most of the world knows about Chicago—has no one ever heard of Al Capone or Michael Jordan or "Hoop Dreams"?—this was obviously just another "line" to be used to keep the locals quiet.

And Mayor 1%, and his hired gun—Chicago-NATO Host Committee Executive Director Lori Healey—even got Deloitte, the international accounting firm, to gin up some numbers to tell everyone what a lucrative time would be had by all in the city: the estimate was \$128 million in short term economic boost. Damn, they were going to create all kinds of (temporary) jobs, the tourists would pay even more, and we'd all be happy. And the place-based 1% located in the Loop salivated.

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The only problem, however, was that they were up against a bevy of activists from all over the City who, for some strange reason, didn't want to go along with this hysterical celebration of the greatest war machine the world has ever known.

The organizing committee for the festivities called itself CANG8 (pronounced "Can-gate," for Chicago Against NATO/G-8). They pulled together people and organizations from all over the greater Chicago area, including folks from the Chicago suburbs and Northwest Indiana. These folks worked for months to organize this, and did an exceptional job. They brought together a myriad of networks, including a range of leftist organizations (socialist, communist, anarchist, pacifist), religious organizations (such as the American Friends Service Committee, as well as mainstream religious denominations), veterans (Iraq Veterans Against the War, Afghanistan Veterans Against the War, and the venerable Vietnam Veterans Against the War), as well as Occupy Chicago and all of its supporters and, albeit to a lot smaller extent, labor (mostly labor activists, with relatively small union participation), and myriads of independent activists. While most activists and organizations were Chicago-based, others were from around the country.

There was some disagreement about uniting with "demonstration-focused" activists and/or groups versus "long-term mobilizing efforts," and this threatened to develop into two separate marches—which would have been stupid in my opinion—but was later overcome by a decision to have the vets lead the entire (single) march. This led to the powerful protest that surged.

Activities abounded, beginning at least by April 21, although the formal protests were set to begin on May Day. Eric Ruder, a member of CANG8, gave an excellent presentation—a "Short and Irreverent History of the G8 and NATO"—at the Open University of the Left. [1]

Building off that, as Chair of the Chicago Chapter of the National Writers Union, I got into a meeting of the City Club of Chicago that was supposed to discuss NATO. (For the City Club, read 1%.) The aforementioned Lori Healey was to report on the NATO meetings and what they meant to Chicago. I had expected to hear an overall, dispassionate report, listing the pros and cons of the meetings, what was going on, etc. What was presented by Healey, however, was a propagandistic report, just extolling NATO and how wonderful its economic benefits would be to the City of Chicago. The Q & A was pretty meaningless until I got up and asked why Chicago was bringing NATO, the greatest war machine in the history of the world, to the city—not only did she refuse to answer, but the Chair immediately ended the meeting. I guess we can't have the "unwashed" asking such questions!

A good, but unplanned for, side effect of my challenging this "dog and pony" show—trust me, the name Goebbels came to mind!—was that the many journalists now had something of interest to inquire about. The *Sun-Times* included the fact that I had specifically asked why war criminals such as Condoleezza Rice and Madeleine Albright were included in the festivities.

After that, there were some labor mobilizations. The first was around May Day, which there's been a growing effort over the last few years to reclaim as Labor Day in Chicago. That Friday, in the northwestern suburb of Rosemont near O'Hare Airport, there was the Labor Notes bi-annual conference—being held for the first time in the Chicago area—where over 1,500 labor activists, unionists and some Labor officials from all over North America at-

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tended. There were also participants from Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Colombia, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Germany, Japan, Mali, Mexico, the Philippines, Portugal, Sweden, the UK and Venezuela. There was a wide range of panels and discus-

sions, interactions and hallway meetings, as people were using their social networks to build for upcoming events in, particularly, Chi-town. The Nurses and Chicago Teachers Union seemed very well represented.

Our National Writers Union Chapter issued a formal statement to the press, Mayor 1%'s office, and all of Chicago's 50 aldermen, arguing that the

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need to protect rights of Free Speech and Assembly for the anti-NATO protesters was paramount, far more important than stroking Mayor 1%'s ego. This was joined by other efforts, in parallel, all demanding that the cops not wear their "robo-cop" gear (as is common in Chicago demonstrations that don't involve Labor) and demanding protections for First Amendment rights. How much impact these efforts had is, obviously, unknown, but most of the cops did not wear the robo-cop gear throughout the main week of protest, and First Amendment rights were generally—sometimes only in the face of refusing to tolerate interference—honored.

There were a couple of educational conferences that took place before NATO arrived. Occupy Chicago and the American Friends Service Committee each provided their members and allies some chances for education and interaction.

The National Nurses Union held a big rally in Daley Plaza in the Loop on Friday, May 18. They brought in Tom Morello (now touring as the "Nightwatchman," but formerly of "Rage Against the Machine"), for a very militant rally. The Mayor's office tried to jack the NNU around—cancelling a permit obtained months before at the last minute on a very transparent lie—but backed down when the NNU told them they were going to go ahead, permit or no. Morello was great, and really helped build some good energy. [2]

Our NWU chapter tried another tack. We decided that we would sponsor a program on "Journalistic Coverage of the NATO Meetings: A Professional Overview." We tried to get a range of corporate journalists to serve as panelists, but none were available or willing. We ended up with an excellent panel—Chris Geovanis, Dr. Paul Street and Stan West—that made powerful presentations, but even with good munchies, and access to the live music that night at one of the best blues bars in Chicago, not a single corporate journalist attended.

The Occupy Mental Health movement organized somewhere near 1,000 activists to go pay a personal visit to Mayor 1%'s house. Ac-

ording to the *Sun-Times*, over \$14 million was spent on NATO-related social events, and yet the Mayor had closed down half of the City's mental health facilities because they required less than \$3 million to keep open for the year. People mobilized and marched to his house, protesting his hypocrisy.

And the big anti-NATO march was on Sunday, May 20. Despite a month of "terror scares," pre-demonstration arrests, and endless repeating of Mayor 1%'s administration rap of their concern for protester "violence," the turnout was strong. The cops said somewhere between 1–2,000, but that's a joke: they had said there were 2,500 at the Nurses rally in Daley Plaza, and this was easily 3–4 times larger. The protesters were out in large numbers, and were unarmed and friendly, with only a few exceptions. (Yes, there were some who wanted to get it on with the cops, but they were pretty limited in numbers and in proportion to the march overall—and when there was cop-protester violence, it was initiated by the police, which obviously is a surprise....)

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The "heart" of the demonstration was the decision of over 40 US military veterans who had served and fought in Iraq and Afghanistan to return their medals to NATO. The vets led the entire march. As a former Sergeant in the USMC, 1969–73, and as a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, I helped provide security for the younger vets: we wanted to keep the media away from the vets during



the march, as this was a very emotionally loaded event for these women and men, and the vets wanted to focus on events at hand. They did media interviews before and after the march. [3]

The corporate media—with few exceptions—did their usual poor job of reporting the demonstration and events. What was shown was some scuffling between cops and some of the Black Bloc folks, although they did not show the real violence that the cops laid on the protesters. There was relatively little discussion of the vets throwing their medals back at NATO. [4]

The next day, Monday, saw a demonstration at Boeing, the gigantic military contractor. Highlight of the protest was a “die in.” Many Boeing employees seemed not to want to come to work that day.

And finally, there was a major protest at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, which had just gotten a huge tax break from the State of Illinois to supposedly keep it from leaving Chicago, and that took place on the Wednesday after the major NATO protest. One of the interesting developments is that the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) had just overfilled

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the Auditorium Building with about 5,500 members to discuss current labor negotiations with the City—with strong indications that they will be ready to strike later this summer—and after their meeting, the CTU brought their members to the Merc to join the demonstration. [5]

Yet how do we evaluate these efforts? First of all, NATO was able to come and have their conference. Certainly, we were unable to stop this, and it seems clear that people would have been killed if they had seriously tried to prevent the conference. So, NATO wins this point on the basis of massive amounts of money, intensive repressive apparatus with a will to use it, and extensive propaganda.

Yet, other than saying they held their meetings, what else can NATO say? I don’t think they can say much. I saw no indication that NATO was embraced by the people of Chicago. If anything, the access restrictions and the militarization of the Loop irritated people. In fact, while waiting to talk to Dick Kay on his WCPT radio program, “Back on the Beat,” the day before the big march, the people speaking ahead of me were overwhelmingly opposed to NATO, mostly on economic grounds.

In fact, people were scared of the developments around the meetings, and many left town and/or did not work in the Loop. There were extensive reminders that parts of the City—including Lake Shore Drive (LSD) and part of I-55 between the Dan Ryan Freeway and LSD, as well as the area around the McCormick Convention Center—were off limits due to the conference, and there were extensive remind-

ers of the militarization of the police (and cops brought in from out of state and Illinois State Police) all over the South Loop.

The “meme” that was projected in support of this was that all the “hippies” and Black Bloc folks were coming to Chicago to recreate 1968, but that “our boys in blue” were ready to protect Chicagoans—and they were prepared to use as much violence as necessary to persevere. Not a very reassuring message, in any case. The corporate media were insistent on presenting this, again and again, ad nauseam. In fact, not only was it not reassuring, but it made people apprehensive—and resulted in many who would normally visit the Loop (locals as well as tourists) staying away. The CPD also arrested some “terrorists” in a pre-Meeting effort to discredit the protesters.

It seemed clear that Mayor 1% was trying to scare protesters away from protesting, while keeping the police on a relatively short leash—although, obviously, they could be released at any time it was deemed necessary.

Two things should be kept in mind, however.

First, extensive organization around the City across the 30 some odd day period, and excellent work by people’s media such as <http://natoprotest.org> and <http://Chicago.indymedia.org> to share with people the events that were developed around NATO, kept NATO and related issues alive across the entire period. They firmly established that there was more than one perspective about these meetings. Multiple educational fora—besides the one presented by the National Writers Union at Rosa’s Lounge, I also got to hear Medea Benjamin speak at the Heartland Café, launching her new book, *Drone Warfare*, and there were a number of others—and conferences allowed issues to be discussed, thought about and acted upon: certainly, they allowed many people to come to have some understanding about the realities of NATO in ways that a one-off protest could have never done. I suggest this is a model that needs to be expanded upon, especially around any major protests: the corporate media will inform that things are coming up, but people’s organizing must contest the “meaning” projected by the corporate media, and provide extensive educational fora beforehand.

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The second thing is that, despite massive and continuous fear-mongering about protester “violence,” which did limit somewhat the participation in the May 20 March, there were still many people—midpoint estimates seem to be around 10,000, far beyond what the police and corporate media proclaimed—who came and marched. The protesters refused to be intimidated by the (literally) thousands

of cops on the street, and they were widely diverse—although predominantly white, as African Americans and Latinos are all-too-familiar with police terrorism in this City—in age, gender, occupation, politics, etc. And the protesters were not armed, were not angry, and generally enjoyed the beautiful day. Their very presence and civility effectively undercut Mayor 1%'s meme of “protester violence.” I’m waiting to see the City’s bill for massive overtime for the 3,100 cops assigned to protect NATO from the peaceful protesters!

There was some violence, as both a small number of protesters and many cops came to rumble. It was a minor, minor part of the day. Yet, the Mayor’s “protester violence” meme was reinforced by whatever violence emerged. While I am not a pacifist, the violence that emerged did allow the corporate media to plug back into the dominant meme, and resulted in the vets’ protest—where they literally threw their medals back at NATO—to be all but ignored. If people want to challenge the cops, that’s up to them, but I also think it is their responsibility to not undercut the larger politics of the protest: I think they would have had a much more positive impact on the day’s activities had they disrupted the freeways not far away, or



Against the War and their more-than-symbolic repudiation of NATO—this city won’t soon forget the response generated against NATO, the greatest war machine that has ever been created.

And if the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strikes during late summer, there’s a lot of solidarity existing in this City to support the solidarity currently being developed within this union. That the CTU is emphasizing things such as equal education, more teachers and support personnel, libraries for all schools—something like 160 schools in Chicago have no libraries!—and the general well-being of all students, ahead of raises (which are also needed, especially with the proposed expanded length of the school day) suggests that some of the lessons of Madison have been learned by trade unionists—and might just get militantly expanded. The Chicago Spring hasn’t ended!

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Notes

1. Placed on-line at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixb4fgv4OKQ.

2. See the report from *Rolling Stone* at www.rollingstone.com/music/news/tom-morello-gets-fired-up-at-chicago-nurses-rally-20120518.
3. http://www.democracynow.org/2012/5/21/no_nato_no_war_us_veterans.
4. For a good comparison between the people’s media and the corporate media, see Paul Street’s *Imagine a People’s Media in Chicago* at www.zcommunications.org/contents/186482/print.
5. For reporting on public education from a pro-union perspective, check out Substance at www.substancenews.net/.

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done something away from the larger march.

In short, Mayor 1% and his cronies can talk all the crap they want to about having a successful NATO meeting in Chicago, but I doubt we’ll ever see NATO meet in this City again.

Activists in this huge city came together in a way I haven’t seen in the 18 years I’ve lived in Chicago, worked out problems and difficulties, did extensive education, challenged the dominant story, developed a people’s media, interfered in the day-to-day operations of a number of organizations, and built solidarity across many barriers: there’s no doubt in my mind that the “left”—however one wants to define it—in this City is now much more unified and aware of each other in a positive manner, as well as being more aware of people’s struggles around the world. It started in Tunisia and Egypt, spread to Wisconsin and then across the Arab world, rooted itself in Greece, exploded in Israel and the UK, and then led to the Occupy Movement. Chicago has earned placement in that firmament—and with the courage of the Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans

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