

# *The Subversive Past*

**TWO ESSAYS**  
from  
**THE PLEASURE TENDENCY**

*further theses: 2*

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## The Subversive Past

We live today in what could be called the continuous present. We progress through time not with a continually growing collective memory, but with a consciousness spanning some ten years into the past and the future. Only the rich, the academic or the eccentric presently escape this. The instance par exemple is the consumer item. Every tool or substance is soon made obsolete by some new embellishment or formula. The home-brewer's Automatic Siphon (with bellows and tap), the Retractable Head Squeeze-Action floor mop, the Bostik Hot Glue Gun (needs special glue pellets), and New Daz are examples which spring to mind. As the previously neglected Leisure field expands, Hobbies provide a new excuse for an explosion of newly complicated or newly created retail items: the cross head screw, the snap-together kit. What was previously unmediated fun, needing only the most rudimentary materials and a great deal of skill and imagination, poses a threat. That activity must be simplified, complicated taken and possessed by the commodity-makers, and once it is their own specialised property, resold to the consumer. The activity is then only available in a represented form, mediated by products, can only be performed through these commodities and therefore becomes a commodity in itself.

Mass production's vast potential has been harnessed not to provide the basic needs of life in abundance, but for the endless reduplication of effort and the trivialisation of diversity. Man's ingenuity has been concentrated into producing the throw-away car, a new fizzy drinks maker, individual fruit pies and the regular-shaped potato crisp. The Paint-Master, advertised on T.V. in May 1984, is a battery powered machine which feeds paint from a reservoir at the hip, through a tube to a specially designed paint roller.

Looking around the everyday environment, there remains hardly anything to hand which has remained the same for a man's lifetime. The teapot, the candle and the hammer perhaps. Even the humble pencil can be modernised, however, into the plastic implement with twelve pop-up points. The coffee pot, seemingly perfectly fitted to its task, must yet have its rival in the vacuum suction design; you don't even have to tip it up to pour elevenses.

In this way, all contact with the past is erased. We are borne along in the present on a crest of a wave of consumables. We are made aware of the passage of time by the circulation of commodities. Anything which is old is seized upon, labelled 'antique' and put in a special price bracket, almost in amazement that it should still exist. It is treasured as a lone assertion of permanence against the current of transience; and yet the institution of the Antique is the final confirmation of the commodity society.

Increasingly we pass through life with no recollection of or connection with the past. Sealed in a capsule of the present, we are allowed contact only with a reality authorised by manufacturers of novelties, and allowed to visit the past only in coach tours to a theme park, as part of another revenue generating activity.

What we see, hear, read, touch and think is carefully controlled by those who have a vested interest in speeding up the flow of possessions. "The Present" is artificially shortened by increasing the velocity at which things and ideas pass before us. Our consciousness, instead of being spread over hundreds of years by connection with artefacts, ideas and customs from those times, is concentrated more and more narrowly. No wonder that sometimes an empty desolation is felt by those whose minutes, having by themselves such little interest, are connected to nothing else -- not the future, not the past, and only to each other by the stubborn will to endure.

Social atomisation is the third dimension of the commodity society; such notions as solidarity, community and transcendent vision pass away as it reaches its perfection. Any concern wider than the individual and the family is seen as a pointless indulgence. This is the apotheosis of capitalist self-interest, and its crisis.

It is more than lucky for our masters that such events as the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Civil War are today "unthinkable", and even the 1981 Riots are relegated to dead history. However, atomisation tends to undermine the social fabric to such an extent that the atomising agency is itself threatened - but not in a subversive way, merely in a way in which barbarism is the logical outcome.

No longer are hardwood oak trees planted, they take too long to mature, long enough anyway to be out of the range of vision of economics. The repository of the idea of bequeathal to the future is a few conservationists and the rich, whose wealth allows them to escape the economics which it has helped to create.

We escape to the "old" things as if they were a subversive oasis in a desert without life. In this secret garden we are able to look at things with a new, and longer perspective. In normal life our dissatisfaction is keenly repressed by the distraction of a thousand petty choices.

Exhortations in the instruments of conditioning on childrearing, sex, marriage, achievement, society and the self change and contradict each other with bewildering rapidity, even from the same source. The only ideology to which these agencies are committed is superficial choice and superficial substitution. Once in the past an idea is only useful for temporary revival. Behaviour must be able to change at a speed to match new industries and the demands of capital. The consumer and labour force must be plastic, ready to be moulded to fit in with new productive patterns, conditions dictated by the development of commodity society. Enduring values are dangerous.

Connection with the past provides standards by which the present existence can be evaluated. Not only is this dangerous today where standards of all sorts are being ground down and the unsatisfactory alternative is always adopted, but also in that in the interests of the present order of things there must be as little public resistance as possible to the ever swifter adjustments necessary in a consumer society - a society which consumes ideas as fast as it consumes useless objects. Although nostalgia is the revolutionary consciousness of the unimaginative, and as such is easily recuperated, awareness that elements of life disappear with increasing speed to be replaced by shoddy and ridiculous substitutes, is only the beginning of a critique condemning the whole system of economic organisation.

## Decline of Pleasure; Rise of Leisure.

For the purpose of this article I am going to make the following definitions. I see Pleasure as self-determined, unmediated and unpaid-for enjoyment. I see Leisure as managed, mediated and paid-for recreation. Common usage would have leisure to mean 'spare time' - time not spent in labour or its service, but since such 'spare time' increasingly takes on the specific character of consuming time, I don't think it unfair to associate Leisure with consumer spending and managerial control; the proliferation of Leisure Centres, Leisure Cards and Leisure Plans shows that capitalism itself accepts such a definition.

Given the reality, which most pundits of our economic and social life are for ever thrusting down our throats, of the end of work as a unifying ethic within capitalism, and taking with that the fact that few see work as anything more than a means to the end of time well-spent in activities other than labour, a survey of the history of conflict originating in areas beyond production would be timely. Its timeliness is further reinforced by the growing recognition that the revolutionary hopes invested in struggles at the point of production have foundered, although that is not to say that I am identifying some new, uniquely revolutionary field of human activity; it is simply that the nature of these struggles in the past point to questions about the nature of human society and its future that seems to me to be pertinent to present reality. As contemporary human beings search for Life's pleasures (and its purpose) in the pre-packaged glitter of the leisure and entertainments industry, the age old struggle between independently determined activity and manipulated behaviour has a poignant relevance.

The time which exists outside labour (and what services it like nutrition, shelter and rest) is what often has given most societies their 'meaning'. It is that area within which religion, ritual, worship, debate take place. Without intending to tread on too many Marxists' toes, it is as significant as the form of production in giving a society its particular 'flavour'. From the individual's point of view how that time is spent is what makes life worth living, or not. It is not my intention to further encourage that crime of capitalism which has produced a vast gulf between 'work' and 'pleasure' nor to deny the illicit amounts of pleasure which people do squeeze from work (a subject needing further examination today). My intention is to focus attention on an area of life which has always been crucial and is likely to become more so.

It is my contention that wherever accumulated power has existed it has waged an unceasing war with its subjects to spread its particular meaning into everyone's life. Thus, it could be said that the Normans sought to impose French onto the Anglo-Saxons (with unparalleled failure), the Church sought to infiltrate its mores into every human act, the Puritans wished pass on ethics of sober self-help to even the most helpless, competitive capitalism equated a human beings worth with their productivity, Thatcherism wishes to imbue every individual with an Entrepreneurial spirit, the Soviet bureaucracy admits of no activity which does not serve the Socialist State. As well as intitiating great struggles around the method and control of production, this tendency towards the administration of the soul has also led to unsung struggles in obscure but no less important areas of life.

## A Short History

I shall start in Anglo-Saxon times because that is what I know. To begin here is not to suggest an Anglo-Saxon Golden Age, nor to pretend that a struggle between individuals and power did not exist before the events I am going to describe.

It is however the struggle between the Church (Christian) and the previous organisations of the Anglo-Saxons which interests me.

There were three areas of life which the Church challenged - all of them outside the realm of production and firmly embedded in the questions of pleasure, 'meaning' and society.

The first concerns the Germanic blood feud. This was a social arrangement whereby order was maintained by the understanding that any wrong done to an individual would be swiftly avenged by that individual's family. Such an understanding was to ensure that people knew they could not do wrong with impunity. It led to some very bloody incidents but also enabled the Germanic tribes to live socially for many years without the benefit of the Church (or Roman Legions in some areas). Christian missionaries hated this practice, they regarded it as expressly against their view of the world as portrayed in the Bible (with special reference to the New Testament). In order to prevent the kind of unruly behaviour blood feuds sometimes resulted in, the Church suggested the creation of 'wergild' (man-money, man-worth). This was a sum of money (determined by the class of person to whom wrong had been done) which the wrong-doer had to pay to his victims family. As the Church gained more power this practice became commonplace and by the 10th Century many complaints were heard:

Now too often kinsman does not protect kinsman any more than a stranger, neither a father his son, nor sometimes a son his own father, nor one brother another.

Unknown Homilist.

It certainly is tempting to say that this is one of the first signs of the essentially 'amoralising' process of the spread of fixed value (money) into human lives. But that maybe too extreme a view in an area where contemporary documentation is sparse. But what can be said is that here is power's intervention into a social practice once free of the imperatives of the new rulers. The creation of the 'wergild' was to impose 'Christian' values onto a people not because social order would necessarily benefit but to alter that people's view of the world. In fact the Christian intervention had a disastrous effect on social behaviour as can be seen in the early 11th Century when Canute issued a law whereby every adult free man was to be in a 'tithing' (a group of 10 men) who were to act as sureties for one another's behaviour "and his surety is to hold him and bring him to answer any charge". In the end the ruling power's meddling with socially accepted rules failed to the extent that it had to resuscitate a practice, albeit in a watered-down fashion, it had itself killed off.

The other two areas which reveal the perpetual battle between freely-determined social activity and imposed, controlled activity centre around the struggle between paganism and Christianity.

There are many places throughout England which used to be heathen meeting places: Peper Harrow, Wye in Kent, Thurstable, Essex, Appletree in Derbyshire, Modbury in Dorset (literally - hill of assembly), Spellow in Norfolk (literally - hill of speech), Roseberry Topping (known as Othin's Hill). These were places for ritual and worship as well as debate and discussion. As

such they had to be destroyed by the Church, not only because of their pagan nature but because general assemblies had no place in the rigid hierarchy of Christianity. The fact that paganism (or was it the desire for general assemblies) did not die easily can be deduced by the destruction by pagans of the Christian Church at Campodum in the 7th Century. Outside of the nature of production human beings were intervening (violently sometimes) on fundamental questions, which in the case of religion includes what one considers the meaning of life to be, and who determines it, priest or people ?

Of course a kind of peace was established, but the point to remember is that the total vision of the Church could not be totally imposed. There was resistance, and the existence of pagan stones in churchyards is proof of that resistance and of the compromise power had to make with it.

The other point connected with the Church's struggle with 'pagan' behaviour lies in the intermittent appropriation of Church Days by the riotous behaviour of certain parishioners. Throughout medieval times parish priests complained of revelling in churchyards and sometimes in churches themselves. Vigils over the dead were seized as an opportunity for conviviality. Church holidays were used for feasts instead of religious observance. From the moment of conversion the Church battled to control the pleasure of the poor.

It is safe to say that this battle was never really resolved until the 19th Century when a far more effective representative of power took up the project of suppression, namely the mass market.

But to return to the further past. The imbibing of alcohol has never been merely pleasurable in itself but often set the scene for all kinds of other delights, from conversation and swearing to singing, riots and fighting. By the end of the 16th Century, Church and lay authorities were getting down to an organised attack upon the people's drinking and associated practices.

The main drink was beer (also an essential part of the agricultural worker's diet) and it was sold in alehouses. In 1552 a Licensing Act had been passed requiring all alehouses to be licensed by 2 Justices. Yet in forty Worcestershire townships surveyed between 1634 and 1638 there were 52 unlicensed alehouses to 81 licensed. In S. Lancashire in 1647 there were 83 licensed and 143 unlicensed ale-sellers. Alehouses were warm, light and, at night, full of people. In S. Lancashire there was approx. 1 alehouse for each 57 inhabitants in 1647 (compared with 1 per 279 inhabitants in Leeds in 1896). Alehouses were where people went to make music, and meet each other for mutual pleasure. Their existence was a direct challenge to the Church's (and the State's) prerogative to control the time which people did not spend in work.

At this time Puritanism was spreading throughout the land. It can partly be seen as the ideology of a rising class which was eventually to transform relationships in the country from a paternalist character to one based on wage labour and the business contract. Thus, a significant attack was launched against holidays, feast-days, dances, sports, etc., as obstacles to the establishment of the more rigidly controlled society Power at that time required. In 1628, Richard Rawlidge wrote:

In those days (late 16th Century) people scorned to be seene to goe to an Alehouse but at all festival times in the yeare and at other times also they used other exercises, as every man liked abroad, as that commendable exercise of shooting, and of beare-baiting, stoole-ball, football, wafters and such like; but now... those publicke exercises are left off, by reason that the Preachers of the land did so envey against them.....whereupon there was some consideration taken of those doings and so the Preachers and Justices did put downe and forbid all such publicke

sportings on the Sabbath day, but when that the people generally were forbidden their old and ancient familiar meetings and sportings what then followed? Why, sure ale-house haunting....so that the people would have meetings, either publicly with pastimes abroad or else privately in drunken Alehouses.....The Preachers did then reprove dalliance, and dancing of maides and young men together; but now they have more cause to reprove drunkenesse and whoring, that is done privately in Ale-Houses.

Ale-houses were thus the refuge of pleasure-seekers from the cold winds of Puritanism which sought a God-fearing workforce which found the meaning of life in work and God, rather than recreation.

The attack upon ale-houses was not only from church and lay authorities. The teaching of the preachers had inspired many whose aspirations were upward, to draw up petitions against alehouses. It was not merely a class issue - it was a struggle between those villagers who welcomed the new moralism and those who sought to enjoy what recreation time and spending power they had outside the organising power of the Church. In the end, after numerous prosecutions (often brought with difficulty because individuals from all classes couldn't see what was so shameful about enjoying yourself) alehouses became less popular. In the 17th Century Sunday schools and dour religious observance reduced the ale-houses' custom until they were viewed as the refuge of the very poor and the probably criminal. By the 18th Century villages maybe had one ale-house and that under strict regulation so that it complemented, rather than rivalled, the Church. It was in the 19th Century that ale-houses gained more independence from the Church, as pubs in industrial cities, but then they had to face the manipulative powers of growing breweries cashing in on the mass market.<sup>1</sup> (They had counterparts in very remote country areas - small beerhouses existed in the 19th Century which may have been organising places for the 'Swing' agricultural riots.)

On the whole it could be said that as far as drinking beer is concerned, a century-wide struggle took place throughout the 17th Century. Made more complex by the shifting fortunes of the Puritans in that century, the struggle over the fate of ale-houses was a pertinent one for the rural population and one which took place well outside the normal parameters of riot, protest or strike over production, and yet no less subversive to power for it. The fact that ale-houses survived in some, albeit limited, form is, in a sense, testament to the authorities' failure to wipe them out, and recognition by them that they could not afford so to do.

To turn our attention away from 'low alehouses' we can look at the opposite end of the spurious hierarchy of culture, namely church music. Throughout the 18th Century a battle took place sometimes resulting in violence, over the kind of church music which was to be played. Simply put, it was a battle between the traditional church bands (made up of local instrumentalists and local singers) and Anglican music reformers who desired 'higher', more devotional music usually accompanied by church organ. The local church bands and choirs usually sang boisterously, often to the tunes of popular dance songs and with ample opportunity for improvisation by the adventurous singer. They had managed to gain such a position in the church services because of the rampant absenteeism of clerics from their sees throughout the 18th Century. They were made up of men from the artisan, lower middle and labouring classes and their music was described by the reformers as 'loud', 'agonising', and 'lawful', but which inspired much enthusiasm amongst

the singers themselves even if little religious devotion was involved.

The early 19th Century Curate of St. Peters Hereford, J.A. La Trobe gives us the best insight into the Church hierarchy's view of the choirs:

Composed as they generally are of rebellious materials, the evils arising from the want of a master spirit to awe them into order, pierce deeper than the mere sensibilities of the hearer. Left, without suitable check, to the evil workings of their own evil passions they find 'the lordship of themselves a heritage of woe!'

Such a view was not shared by the choir themselves. Indeed as La Trobe shows they were prepared to meet their planned demise with stiff resistance to the reforming vicar:

They murmur their sullen insolence; and upon a third, and more decisive remonstrance, if they adopt no more offensive step, desert him altogether, and the singing is in consequence laid aside. It moreover, not infrequently happens, that the low spirit of malignity which boils in the breasts of the common people when thwarted, cannot content itself with inert opposition but bursts forth in secret or overt acts of annoyance. Not only are his ministrations deserted, but his property injured and his person insulted, by those who once ranked with him in the service of the sanctuary.

The battle went well into the 19th Century. 'The Parish Choir', published by the 'Society for promoting Church Music', reports of fights between old choirs and the new organ-orientated ones and organised boycotting of tradesmen who participated in the new choirs. The final blow for the old democratic choir was struck in 1866, Nov. 5th when the Walsingham Church organ was blown up. But by then rural depopulation and the cementation of more rigid village relationships ensured the demise of the popular pastime of church choirs and bands (along with many others). A society where waged work was becoming more and more vital to the process of accumulation could not afford the relaxed, chaotic, country pleasures of the past. Discipline was required, and with it deference, sobriety, respectability, and quiet. An individual was to spend his recreation in the company of his family, behind closed doors, maybe reading the Bible, and not out carousing with his friends.

What happened to the church bands and choirs also happened to other pastimes. In Oxfordshire 1800, Whitsuntide was a 13 day debauch, by 1900 it was a one-day Bank Holiday. Instead of barrels and barrels of home brew, sports, music and dance, orderly processions took their place (although it should be said that there were still complaints from some quarters that drunkenness and fighting broke out). This is not to elevate drinking and fighting as somehow necessarily subversive, far from it. This is merely to show that there is a history of perpetual struggle over the point of pleasure and that that struggle did shape the kind of society that existed. Popular pleasures were either suppressed as in church bands or incorporated as in the alehouses, but neither took place without a great deal of disobedience, if not open, sometimes violent, resistance. The suppression of traditional holidays was part of Power's assault upon self-determined activity as well as attempting to adjust the rural population to the fixed hours of wage labour.

So far most of this ancient struggle over the nature of pleasure appears in a rural context. The population shift to the cities in the 19th Century did not end this conflict, nor did it leave it unchanged.

Joseph Binns of Batley, Yorkshire wrote in 1882:

*From Dangerous Pleasures . . . . .*

TO THE  
**INHABITANTS**  
OF  
**WOODHOUSE, &c..**

---

**FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS,**

The approach of the Feast has suggested some Considerations, to which I invite your serious Attention.

In the course of the last few Years, or even in the last few Months, many of you have, in various ways, felt the Pains of Poverty, when from the largeness of your Families, the smallness of your Wages, or your entire want of Work, you have found it impossible, *without the help of others*, to obtain the necessaries of life; and in your best condition it has been difficult to procure for yourselves and families, many of those comforts which it is so desirable all classes should enjoy. In such of you as have been so circumstanced, would it not be a piece of folly to waste even a little of your small means at the coming Feast, and thereby bring upon yourselves afterwards bitter regret and self-condemnation?

With others amongst you who are better off, the mere pecuniary consideration may not have so much weight; but when we reflect how the Feast often commences in Sabbath-breaking, how much money is uselessly spent and time wasted,—what drunkenness, and, in consequence thereof, sudden deaths,—what cursing and swearing,—what licentiousness of conduct in other ways it produces, it surely becomes the duty of all, but especially of those who make any profession of religion, to beware of what has in its train so many evils.

Think not that I want to encroach upon the rational enjoyments of the labouring classes, or to lessen their comforts,—far otherwise: I wish to increase them; and if I did not believe that your temporal welfare and comfort were likely to be lessened, and the eternal interests of your immortal souls endangered, you would not have received from me the present warning to

**BEWARE OF THE FEAST.**

I am your Friend,

**ROBERT JOWITT.**

*Woodhouse-Lane, 9th Mo. 26th, 1834.*

---

A. PICKARD, PRINTER, TOP OF BRIGGATE, LEEDS.

*. . . . . To Administered Leisure.*

From :- City of Leeds, Summer Entertainments  
For All. 1945.

"I urge everyone, young and old, to get out of doors and into the fresh air of the Parks whenever possible and I extend to you all a Hearty Welcome to any of our Entertainment attractions. You will find them always carefree and inexpensive, whilst the healthy and pleasing conditions under which they are presented will have a vitalising effect on your General Health.

When the 'Curtain Rings Down' on the last night of the Season's Entertainment Programme it is my fervent hope that 'Peace with Victory' will be ours. Meantime I say to you all GET FIT AND KEEP FIT - WORK HARD AND PLAY HARD, by so doing you will serve both your Country and yourself truly and well!"

Alderman Alf Masser of the Parks Committee.

....the first policeman came into our midst, to plant the thin end of the wedge, which was to revolutionize our manners and customs. Since he came....we have lost all trace of mumming; all trace of Lee Fir....most of mischief night; as nearly all the peace eggers; for what are left of the latter are of another mould to those of my childhood days....If mummers were to be seen upon the street now, the police would interfere. I put a deal of this severance from ourselves of old customs down to the advent of the policeman in uniform.

The 19th Century was the century when the two methods of pleasure suppression met and one, building upon the work of the other, emerged triumphant. The two methods were, the old religious practice of direct repression, and the practice of incorporation, a practice which progressively bound the experience of pleasure to the spending of money. As the police cleared the streets of the free pleasures of acting the fool and trickery, stall-holders, club-owners, breweries, the full weight of the mass market swept in to take their place. But not without resistance.

A fine example of the dynamic between repression and incorporation can be seen in the struggle over street football in Derby, 1840's. Street football had been played 'from time immemorial' on Shrove Tuesday by men and Ash Wednesday by boys. It was played by hundreds of people and when played, stopped all business, work and enterprise. It was used as a holiday by the townspeople, with families watching the game and meeting friends. Attempts had been made to stop it throughout the 18th Century without success. In 1845 two factions wanted to stamp it out. An Evangelical faction which wished to carry on the time-honoured function of the church to control the people's pleasure and a 'liberal' faction of 'rational recreationists' who wished to provide peaceful, and no doubt less injurious to business, amusements for the populace.

In 1846, '47, '48 and '49, troops were brought in to halt the football game. In '46 they failed to halt riots taking place. The ball was smuggled into the market-place (where the game traditionally began) by a woman, 'Mother Hope', thus leading not only to the start of the game but also to a number of score-settling acts against those who had banned the game, including the Mayor. It was clear that simple force was not enough.

So, alternative games were set up. They had very little success in 1846, but the idea was a good one. After 1845 the idea of horse racing as an alternative to the football game was floated by the rational recreationists. Traditionally the leisure of the gentry, race meetings had the advantage of taking the population out of the town, placing them in the position of spectating rather than participating, and perhaps most importantly was a leisure activity which encouraged the spending of money.

'The commercial importance of the meeting is reflected in the presentation of a plate of £200 by Derby tradesmen to boost the prize money, for, as the race supporters put it, the meeting brought "advantages in a pecuniary point of view....too obvious to require prominent notice."

("") - Derby Mercury, 1845, quoted by Anthony Delves.

To the Evangelicals, horse-racing was as bad, if not worse, as the football. However, their's was a fading star and the Mayor, William Mousley, although violently opposed to football, supported racing:

'If some clergymen and ministers of religion were to have their

own way, everything they did not take an interest in, or of which they disapproved, must be abolished at once on the ground of immorality.'

After 1853 not much was heard about street football in Derby.

We are now entering the critical part of the history of pleasure, the part where Power far from seeking to crush enjoyment, seeks to use it, encourage it, sell it. It is the time when pleasure became leisure and leisure becomes consumption. A time when self-determined activity is no less under threat than it had been previously, but also a time when resistance to this manipulation and incorporation of desire becomes harder and harder to see.

On the one hand it appears that, for the first time, the people were going to gain some (albeit tempered by income) access to pleasures previously denied them, but the reality was different, as Asa Briggs points out:

To an economic historian pausing briefly after surveying the field... (of mass entertainment)...the main conclusion must be that the chief theme of the story is the way in which massive market interests have come to dominate an area of life which until recently was dominated by individuals themselves....The massiveness of the control is certainly more revealing than the often dubious statements made by the controllers about the character of the 'masses' whose wants they claim they are satisfying.

The stimulation of the economy by demand was a fundamental need of capitalism in the 19th Century. Markets were continually being sought for products, old and new. The people had more spending power. Their work was fastened to fixed hours. This meant that emerging out of centuries of mixed work and pleasure which an agricultural society sustained, came an era where leisure time became more and more defined. Rather than a life where one took one's pleasures as they came, a life developed where both work and recreation were strictly demarcated. This not only meant better work discipline but also enabled the first significant intervention of the market into the pleasure field. In 'leisure time' it had a captive consumer force and it was not long before firms sprang up selling Sunday holidays, or evening entertainments. Spectator sports, music halls and holiday towns soon followed. Enjoyment became less communal, because work was often separate from where a person lived - one worked with one group of people, 'played' with another. The rural pursuits which had survived in the big cities, such as cock-fighting or boxing, faded in the face of such modern delights. Recreation became tied to the activity of consumption; by the end of the century a Victorian economist could write:

The general conclusion from all the facts is, that what has happened to the working classes in the last fifty years is not so much what may properly be called an improvement as a revolution of the most remarkable description.....From being a dependent class without future and hope, the masses of working men have in fact got into a position from which they may effectually advance to almost any degree of civilisation.

Robert Giffen, 1887.

This meant that the working class was fair game for the leisure entrepreneurs. Blackpool was one of the first seaside towns to recognise this. Ignoring where possible the objections of the middle classes, Blackpool's civic authority and its capitalists pitched for the working class consumer. Taking advantage of a weak evangelical lobby, ample pubs were provided. In the 1870's the South Jetty (now Central Pier) was opened,

followed by Raikes Hall Pleasure Garden. By 1878, £1/2 million was invested in leisure and entertainments. Cheap hotels abounded, attracting the Lancashire cotton workers to the town. What really made the resort for the working class was the refreshing lack of restrictions. Sabbath-breaking was institutionalised by the civic authority itself when it introduced a Sunday service on the trams in 1896. By-laws against street traders and hawkers were laxly put into effect. Little was allowed to get in the way of the working class holiday....and the working class shilling.

Inexorably, what was once self-determined activity, became activity encouraged and manipulated by powerful economic interests. Already by 1887 advertisers were happy to admit to themselves the utterly cynical nature of their job:

The usefulness and value of most things depend, not so much on their own nature as upon the number of people who can be persuaded to desire and use them.

An Advertisers' Guide to Publicity. (1887)

Consumption (that activity where the individual spends his money to buy something he uses) is an atomising process. It is an activity confined to the individual (at the very most a family may consume as a unit). It is dependent upon the person's own particular spending power (collectives rarely consume), only groups of individuals each tied up with the knowledge of their own particular worth, and unlikely to throw in their money to a pool for all to enjoy. Such activity is in marked contrast to the unpaid for, unpriced pleasures of street football, singing, dancing, etc.

As consumption (Leisure) became the dominant mode of filling (spending) spare time, fewer and fewer examples of social struggles outside work occur. Is this to say that discontent is now confined to the misery of the workplace only? If that were so then one could see a capitalism moving inexorably to the New World, abolishing its misery by abolishing work.<sup>2</sup> The reality is obviously different. The absence of social struggles around spare time does not preclude the presence of private struggles at this point, indeed it seems to me that a condition of struggles over the 'point of pleasure' becoming social is the recognition of the existence of the ever present private conflicts.

Indeed, some kind of social struggle outside production did emerge from the time when consumption began to dominate spare time. Although not often manifesting themselves as conflicts over how spare time was filled, they did reveal themselves as part of the struggle of humanity to free itself from labour, rather than merely seek an improvement in that labour.

It has been said by Stanley Parker in The Future of Work and Leisure:

Estimates of annual and lifetime leisure suggest that the skilled urban worker may only have regained the position of his thirteenth-century counterpart.

(1972)

In 1761 the Bank of England closed on 47 Bank holidays, by 1834 the Bank of England recognised only 4 Bank holidays. But it would be wrong to assume that the people have passively allowed their time to have been ripped away from them. If official holidays had diminished, unofficial ones abounded:

.....having had a spree on the Saturday night, and taken numerous hairs of the dog that bit them on the Sunday without experiencing that benefit which is popularly supposed to result from such a proceeding, (they) avail themselves of the

circumstances of Monday being a holiday to have an appropriate and characteristic wind-up of their weekly spree by a day's idling and drinking.

T. Wright - 'Some habits and customs of the working classes' 1867

It was no official holiday they were taking but a self-appropriated day known as 'Saint Monday'. Monday absenteeism is and was rife throughout industrialised Britain. All the discipline of the factory system failed to eliminate it. In Leicester at a boot and shoe factory in 1874, 40% of the riveters were absent every Monday from March to June, 17% every Tuesday and 12% every Wednesday. Saint Monday is interesting in many ways. Apart from the simple fact that it shows work discipline is never as complete as some historians might like it to appear, Saint Monday reveals a working population quite prepared to sacrifice spending power for free time.<sup>3</sup> And what is more, the pastimes enjoyed by Saint Mondayites were often spontaneously organised, including athletics meetings, boxing matches and dog-racing. Self-managed holidays such as these prefigure a social practice very common in the 1960's and '70's Western industrialised nations. Indeed, they gave headaches to the same people, bosses and trade union leaders alike decried this activity in both centuries and for similar reasons. However, what capital loses on the swings it attempts to recoup on the roundabouts. In the 1870's certain leisure entrepreneurs became sensitive to the existence of the Monday holiday and began to cash in; day trips to the seaside were organised on Mondays throughout the summer, as were trips to Crystal Palace. Similarly, nowadays, there are no end of activities for the absentee worker to contribute to. Spare time is fought for, but resistance to its administration and commodification remains outside the social sphere.

We are nearing the end of our rather eclectic survey of the struggle between those who take their pleasure as direct as possible and those who seek to mediate or provide forms of mediation between the desire and its fulfillment. We have tried to show that if there has been a struggle at the point of production for justice and decent working conditions of work, there has been an equally significant one over the question of pleasure and 'meaning'.

We have tried to show that the experience of enjoyment is not a tiny side-issue when compared with the more weighty questions of production. Indeed it can be argued that it was the victory of the more actively moralising forces organised broadly around Puritanism which laid the basis for the change in the nature of production in the countryside which, in its turn, formed the culture from which industrialisation was to grow. There is much evidence to show that it is the view individuals hold of the world which shapes the decisions they take about production. Would the Anglo-Saxon 'general assemblies' have agreed to the substitution of money for direct retribution? And, if they had held sway, what implications would the retention of the old way have had on the process of accumulation? Would church or state have had as much land? Would the destruction of common land have taken place at all if men and women knew they had to answer for their actions directly rather than hide behind a wad of money? Of course these are futile questions, grossly simplified and ignoring the fact that Norman rule would have destroyed such behaviour as effectively. But it is to resurrect the idea of human history as human, as something upon which humans can act and be effective, that is part of the purpose of this essay.

Human activity centred on consumption does, however, often have effects unintended by the protagonist. The flexibility of the market in adapting to customer dislikes can mean that criticism of the market can actually strengthen it. For every partial refusal capital finds within it an affirmation of itself.

For example, in 1850, a number of bakeries made their first attempt at factory produced bread. Two, the League Bread Company and Stephen's Machine Bread Making Company collapsed by the 1860's, largely because of consumer resistance to factory bread. Other firms learnt the lesson, and farmed out bread making to small bakeries which was then sold by the parent company. Thus, a consumer resistance was overcome and the larger companies maintained control. A small victory for the consumer had occurred which threatened nothing, except that capitalism had had to adapt to it, just as capitalism has had to adapt to the existence of strikes and industrial disputes. In a sense it is proof of our potential. Consumer resistance, more mysterious because it has a 'collective' effect while being based on individual decisions, could well be the 'reformism' of an anti-consumption ethic. Further investigation is vital here.

What is certainly true is that the struggle against the domination of life by the accelerating circulation of things and money is a lonely affair. The decisions which an individual makes about their life and how it could flourish take place behind closed doors, with only the TV and other media to keep one's company. It is a struggle which does not manifest itself in spectacular explosions of refusal, nor which has any dynamic within it leading towards a unity of purpose with other individuals. In an age where privacy is continually under assault by the ad-men of triviality or ideology, the existence of this atomised, privatised, agonising is fragile. Indeed, many will say non-existent, asserting a view of humanity consuming under a spell cast by the all-powerful brokers of the commodity, happy as sandboys. If such a view were true then why bother to protest? A happy humanity is all that could be asked for. But at every area of life discontent shows itself; from the constant complaints of intellectuals of both conservative and reforming disposition about the purposelessness of the expanding clutter which makes up existence to the more active disquiet of vandals, hooligans and environmentalists. Even the decision to 'do up' the old car rather than fork out for another limited-life one has implications for this society, forcing it to adapt in some way to the desires of its subjects. It is not a question of encouraging this or that type of behaviour, merely to recognise the existence of such behaviour and its reasons is enough to see a new area of struggle solidifying in front of ones' eyes. As we have shown, the battle is not a new phenomenon, it has a history as old as Power itself.

#### Into the Future.

When I said some of our contemporary problems were created by the industrialisation and fixing of leisure-time of the last century, I meant, only some. For I think we are entering a period of history as formative as the Industrial Revolution.

Conventional wisdom has it that recreational pursuits are determined by occupation and class. And it is obviously true that they have a bearing, a higher proportion of workers in boring, desk-bound or assembly line jobs tend to more 'creative' recreation such as gardening, hobbies, etc., than their professional counterparts (and long may they remain so). But the sobering fact is that a democracy of leisure is developing, and it appears to centre itself around passive rather than active pursuits. Although 'performed' by many, many people, these pursuits do not unify them or even bring them together. The kind of activity is media-dominated (TV taking up by far the most of people's 'free' time) or organised by someone other than the participant. It usually requires the participant to spend money. It is available to all - indeed in 1975 it was estimated that the 'working class' enjoyed more recreation time than the 'middle class'. (Although the middle class still has more money to spend within that time). Less and less do there exist class holiday zones - all areas of the Mediterranean are now open to the

cheap holiday, for example. Spending power does affect consumption but it is its quantity rather than its quality which is affected.

With this democracy of consumption comes a new ethic. It is an ethic, a shaky historical precedent of which some sociologists find in the Ancient Greeks.

'In classical Greece it was believed that the ideal, balanced way of life was incompatible with work, which was therefore left to slaves. Indeed, a major justification of slavery in the ancient world alleged its necessity if free men were to lead lives of leisure.'

'Leisure' Kenneth Roberts.

Leisure, as an end in itself is certainly coming. The emphasis on lifestyle, the drift away from 'man-shaped patterns of employment' (see previous articles on effeminisation), the channeling of individual energies into definitions of self independent of occupation (youth cults, music tastes, drug cultures, 'yuppies', a term increasingly linked with health and fitness narcissists rather than actual job status) point to a new 'meaning' being created by Power to maintain itself. Indeed, now leisure can intrude upon and affect work (rather than the other way round), with demands from both the managerial and worker sides of industry for leisure facilities at work, for work time to be organised to fit leisure 'needs', even for work itself to take on some of the forms of leisure, such as being interesting, 'creative' and 'fun'.

Away from the neanderthal posturing of Thatcherite 'Victorianism', a quiet revolution is taking place, one where the obligations of production and consumption become increasingly confused. The area of community projects and 'concerned' corporations is its terrain, the production of an ideology that 'life is to be enjoyed' is its aim, the maintenance of a system of managed humanity is its end. Both the social welfare branch and the multinational subsidiary are committed to the project. As the need to labour diminishes, the establishment of an ethic of consumption presents itself as the ideal dirt to muddy the waters of human perception. Rather than liberate humanity from overseen labour and unsatisfying recreation, (an opportunity which technological progress could bring) the beneficiaries of Capital seek to perpetuate it (although it is hard to see what else they could do given the paucity of real opposition to themselves.) By fixing status, mental health, psychological well-being, 'purpose' to the achievement of accumulation, not only of goods and services, but also of experiences, Power seeks its eternal advancement:

'The traditional sociological, residual definition of leisure as time left over, is slowly being replaced or at least supplemented by a psychological one, that identifies leisure as a state of mind. Such a metamorphosis is a slow and gradual process coming about because the condition of society and the problems confronting us in the post-industrial era demand it.'

J. Neulinger, 'Leisure Newsletter', 1979.

The shrinkage of obligatory labour time is surely a mark of an efficient society. Since the year Dot humanity has sought to reduce its time spent in necessary labour. The production of the ideology of the accumulation of experiences ('the leisure ethic') will cover up the mass of wasted human effort that is this society. Both the private corporations and the departments of state (national and local) have an interest in the planning and propagation of this ideology (see article on 'The resurrection of the community'). It maintains a hierarchy of planners and accumulators of wealth. Leisure becomes a 'social right' to be dished out to the poor by community

organisations, or served up to the affluent by the leisure industry. In both cases it is tawdry, mediated stuff, very likely to turn to ashes in one's mouth if tasted too often. To those who cannot find any resistance to this abundance of marketable experiences I would say: what would resistance look like? Constantly changing marketing techniques, a plethora of bankruptcies in the holiday business, a tendency amongst people to plan their own holidays, distrust of tourists(4), outbursts of violence at leisure venues (football matches and seaside resorts(5)), all point to exactly the kind of conflict one would expect an institution such as the leisure industry with its appeal to the private individual and its public face of unblemished 'niceness', to generate. Resistance cannot advertise itself - its target is too much a good thing in the public eye. It may be one of our tasks to create a climate where the private dissatisfaction with leisure can become public, but a warning - unless that dissatisfaction has at its heart the rejection of commodity relations and corporate management then it will mutate into yet another catalyst producing one more, 'new and exciting', administered experience.

## NOTES

1. A survey of the transition of the ale-house from house to shop in the 19th Century has been done by George Williamson and well worth a read.

2. From a 1935 Survey on London Life and Labour:

....all the forces at work are combining to shift the main centre of the worker's life more and more from his daily work to his daily leisure.

3. '....if a man can support his family with 3 days labour, he will not work 6.' History of Birmingham Hutton.

'In Birmingham....an enormous amount of time is lost, not only by want of punctuality in coming to work in the morning and beginning again after meals, but still more by the general observance of 'Saint Monday'.

1862 III Report of Commissioners. Parliamentary Papers.

'....the men....(are) regulated by the expense of their families, and their necessities; it is very well known that they will not go further than necessity prompts them, many of them.'

Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee of the Whole House, 1812.

For an example of how work and pleasure could be mixed despite the strict division of time desired by 19th Century capitalism the following comes from the Birmingham Journal, 26 Sept. 1855:

....the industry of the people was considered extraordinary; their peculiarity of life remarkable. They lived like the inhabitants of Spain, or after the Custom of the Orientals. Three or four o'clock in the morning found them at work. At noon they rested; many enjoyed their siesta; others spent their time in the workshops eating and drinking, these places being often turned into tap-rooms and the apprentices into pot boys; others again enjoyed themselves at marbles or in the skittle alley. Three or four hours were thus devoted to 'play'; and then came work again until eight or nine and sometimes ten, the whole year through.

(on Birmingham workers)

4. Distrust of tourists is taken to the limit in The Phillipines, one slogan of a guerilla movement there is 'Kill a Sex Tourist a Day'.

5. This is not to suggest that hooliganism is in any sense revolutionary or anything more than a manifestation of decay. Its existence is noted here as an example of the inability of Leisure to satisfy.

A more interesting development is the refusal of many to abide by the instructions of those embalmers of culture - The National Trust and English Heritage - and have attempted to break police road-blocks to establish a mass festival around Stonehenge. The point here lies not only in the desire of some to organise their own pleasures (albeit in great danger of recuperation as long as appeals to Myth and Religion hold sway) but in the reaction of Authority to those who do not participate in the Leisure Market. The same weekend as police smashed up The Convoy, 100,000 were being welcomed to the grounds of an Irish castle to listen to Bruce Springsteen. No doubt the same problems of sanitation and litter existed in Ireland, but the Springsteen watchers had paid, while those attending Stonehenge would not.

(The fact of the matter is that it is the induced cultural significance of Stonehenge which really threatens it. As more and more visit, encouraged by the fact that one has to pay to do so, paths get eroded, etc. Those who have advertised Stonehenge (The National Trust and English Heritage) are therefore responsible for its destruction.)

Bibliography: Most of the information and quotes and some of the ideas can be found in the following books:-

- Dorothy Whitelock - Anglo-Saxon England.
- Eileen Yeo (ed.) - Popular Culture in Britain 1590-1914.
- Hamish MacFraser - The Mass Market.
- Kenneth Roberts - Leisure.
- Alvin Toffler - Future Shock.

