

AGAINST SLEEP



AND NIGHTMARE #8

Against Sleep And Nightmare #8 (Summer 2010)

Introduction	1
The Modern Rings Of Survival	8
Panorama	15
Dream, Transcendence, Communism	22
Further Notes On The Crisis	33

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I aim to make these ideas as simple as possible but no simpler. Revolution may seem like a ridiculous idea - it is simply that all other ideas in this age are more ridiculous. Labels are often deceptive at this moment in history. For those who still need some, *Against Sleep And Nightmare* is, very roughly, a Situationist-influenced, anti-state communist magazine. Related or not tendencies and authors today include *Aufheben* published in Brighton, UK, Gilles Dauve, *End Notes*, and *Theorie Communiste*. Read and get your own impression.



Insert Clever Title Here

The Apotheosis of Work

Sitting in a haze of exhaustion. The modern world runs on this same sleep deficit. The primary experience in this modern world is work. But work is no longer confined to the factory or the office but rather spills over everywhere. Today work is decomposed into its component parts - boredom, frenzy, effort, distraction and sloth. Even if you are unemployed, you can get much of the experience of a job just by driving through downtown, standing in a welfare line or going to the emergency ward.

Work is also intertwined with interpersonal relationships (which we “work at”), with developing contacts for real jobs combined with treating love as if it was a job, filled with bureaucracy and competition. Like any age, the present age has feelings characteristic of it - confusion, overwhelm and desperation in this case. This situation does offer us the opportunity to become more adaptable and flexible. If you could say that a modern citizen has positive attributes, adaptability would be among them. At the same time, we can see the problems that unlimited adaptation can lead to.

To understand the present era, you can ask what power do you have over a three block radius around where you live? The logic of traffic, the logic of zoning, the logic of real estate and the logic of money crowd out any influence of those who just happen to be located in the area. You may have many choices in a complex game but you are given few choices *about the rules*.

Discussions about “issues” today generally occupy a completely different place in people’s minds than their awareness of the conditions of their own

lives. And the present world has leveraged and increased this disconnect, extending it further into our relationship with even our own bodies (when a person repeats the arguments that teachers, bosses, television or advertising want, you may even hear a particular tone of voice reflecting a characteristic tension in his or her body). Everywhere, the urge to escape exists and everywhere it is harnessed to blow the ship of capital further along its path. Every partial liberation stands as a bulwark against complete liberation from the present *system*.

We live in a world where each person has a vague idea of the horror of things. Most people have learned as much as they can stand and sense that the rest is even worse. So those who imagine that they can change things merely by revealing vast conspiracies are sorely mistaken – any shock quickly turns to despair.

If we are going to tie these things together, we have to operate differently than usual. Here, we must follow a spiral path in describing the overall conditions of life. We go into one topic and then jump to go to another hoping to bring the entire picture together.

This Fluid World

Social contact is a wonderful, multifaceted thing. We are meshed in signing and signaling, in competition and cooperation, in complex and sensuous interchange. Yet the way the present world uses this complexity is by putting us in a whirlpool of the transformation of our creative power into a apparently reliable, transportable and sellable product. If there is a delusion of modern religion and ideology, it is that human

beings do not need each other, that human beings are not physical, needy beings but rather abstract choosers. Our relations are mediated with words, with gestures, with text, with images and with skin. Modern capitalism rips up the context of multiple layers of communication and leaves the raw calculation, calculation which dispenses with the convenient truce within the competition - "the leader of the game becomes the leader" Vaneigem. The Internet is just the most obvious way capitalist relations put us in competition with the entire world.

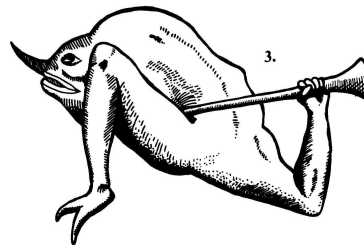
Yet, it is not the capitalists themselves who achieve fluidity or even the capitalist enterprise as such. We are the ones who are forced to be flexible. Work is universal and we, the dispossessed, are its ultimate product. The condition of

having nothing to sell but labor is more and more universal. Moreover, we are the ones asked to be fluid enough to solve this society's escalating crises. Yet the more easily we adapt to the crisis, the more quickly the “race to

the bottom” can unfold. The accelerating crisis is the ultimate, natural expression of this. Crisis is like a boulder rolling down a hill; a lucky some are able to dodge cleverly out of the way, while the unlucky others are crushed regardless. While some of the twists and turns of this process are out of anyone's hands, others are cleverly guided by those seeking profit. One thread that runs through this magazine is determining the mix between these two aspects of the crisis.

A Decaying Realm Of Vision

In the now distant 2008 Republican primary, commentators compared the candidates unfavorably to Ronald Reagan, calling them shallow and foolish. Historical amnesia now masks



Against Sleep And Nightmare

the empty imbecility for which Reagan was famous while president. Conveniently, Reagan's idiotic repetition of platitudes did not result in disasters akin those of the Bush era (or, equivalently for spectacle, the disasters of Reagan's presidency are no longer remembered). Unfortunately for Republican electoral fortunes, the destruction of New Orleans, the invasion of Iraq and the collapse of the economy were still fresh in the popular memory in November, 2008 – though naturally barely remembered in 2010.

This is the level that news has reached. History, economics, philosophy, law or any other formerly respected profession orbits around the same whirlpool of gossip and innuendo. *Against Sleep And Nightmare* has been sporadically published in radical opposition to the present order: one of a very few efforts that attempt to continue the total opposition strategy articulated by the obscure (or infamous) Situationist International. One notable aspect of the present world is that its many insane "features" are bounding ahead while any ostensible opposition seems frozen in stereotypical eras of the past – stuck in the 1960s, stuck in Russia of 1917, stuck in Spain of 1936 or stuck in even hoarier eras, like Seattle 1999.

Whatever their flaws, the SI described the way the thread of earlier historical opposition could reappear in the world, as it has, not just in May 1968, but even in Argentina in 2002. However, a further crucial aspect of this world is that it is changing at a break-neck speed. Each year, the world markets crack the whip for more flexibility with lower costs while humans adapt haphazardly to the technological and environmental transformation of their lives.

If there were any sophisticated observers of the last fifty years, they would note many instructive transformations of the qualitative into the

quantitative and back again. But since these transformations involve the ability of quantities of money to simulate the qualities of education, sophistication and intelligence, we would have to deduce that sophisticated observers are becoming ever less common under the present regime.

Of course, we aim for a reversal of this stream of horrors. While one might unfavorably compare modern citizens to those of previous eras, we are merely strange and awkward adapters to a nightmarish environment. We modern people think abstractly and ignorantly. It



is a product of our material conditions. The dawn of civilization witnessed knowledge being transformed from oral traditions to written facts. If I or many modern students today cannot write an essay without a spell checker or balance a checkbook without a spread sheet, it is a response to a material situation akin to the change in the early reader's use of their memory.

Thus our modern praxis, for good or ill, is flowing with the sea of information around us. Certain "Marxist scholars" might ask whether "immaterial production" is a part of the "real economy". Present day society has answered this question by merging the two irreversibly. China's factories are supplemented by videogame virtual "gold miners" and services outsourced to India or Jamaica. Never has the condition of the totality been a more pressing question and never have more

obstacles been placed in the way of our answering that question.

The Knife's Edge

We are all time-travelers. Anyone with taste will realize that the time is much too late, that the present order is rotten and has held on way beyond its expiration date. Out of this, the crucial times of youth, of being part of unique occasions, are lost very quickly today. Deadness is universal. We must be prepared for a slow slog through the present banality. And we must be prepared for the sudden transformation of life into a situation with possibilities (though not certainties). The collapse of the economy only increases this despair unless mass resistance appears.

If we take this society as a single reality arrayed in front of us, we can see that it deploys the quantitative and the qualitative very vigorously. It deploys an army of engineers accompanied by a further army of advertisers and salespeople, with the traditional army eventually following. At the same time, it degrades both quantitative and qualitative experience. The administration of George Bush showed merely crude examples of repressing science for political expediency. Far more all-encompassing are those factors which allow science, journalism or other "objective" institutions to censor themselves (these still being maintained in the more rational Obama administration). These are complex processes where experts rely on more rarefied and unreachable experts to reach their opinions. From the AIDS crisis to the destruction of the WTC, we can see large events even the rough outline of which cannot be believed except by blindly accepting official stories of dubious value.

This world of whirling confusion creates an odd conservatism. The residents of the modern world put in constant effort to keep a mental balance within this life of unbalance. OCD

Against Sleep And Nightmare

(obsessive compulsive disorder) and ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactive disorder) are a dangerous whirlpool that we must now carefully steer clear of.

Whether true or false, “Conspiracy theory” is a pole of obsession which psychological self-protection steers the modern citizen away from. But there is no escape in the end. Those who accept the official logic of the 911 attacks have still become as attached to a particular, unprovable position as those who choose one of the fifty-seven explanations peddled by truthout.org.

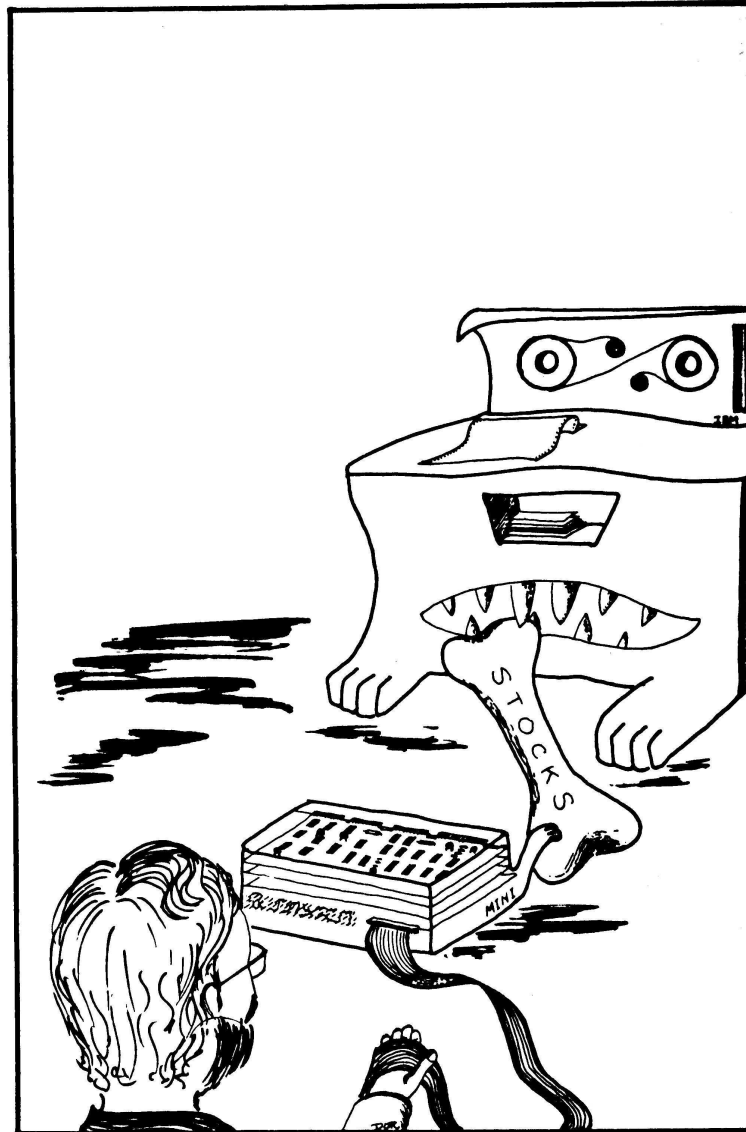
When we look at the sea of uncertainty in which a modern person must swim, the flow comes as a fusion of intentional deception and the rising complexity of social relations – both effects naturally being products of advancing capitalist society. It is crucial to have a critical perspective on what ideas are useful as opposed to which ideas are intentional or unintentional decoys.

Though at varying rates, the cells of the human body divide and replace themselves. Thus a person is composed of substantially different matter than they were seven years previously. Similarly, capitalist society has incorporated different cultural traditions, different religious traditions and different personal attitudes yet has remained the same beast. Even the pieces that seem constant, like religion or heterosexual monogamy, have been renewed with narratives from Eastern Religion and scientific experimentation.

We can't take a moral attitude to the conditions of culture. In today's society, advertising and self-help are the strongest, most active elements of culture, pointing the way to defining new

forms of interpersonal relations. “High culture” is merely a remnant whose secondary role became evident fifty years ago in pop art – of course, now all art is “pop art” in the sense that high art is

approach might indeed have been correct in 1870 but it cannot succeed presently. “Sound bites” are inevitable in a quick revolution – our challenges will be to relate to them clearly.



merely “niche marketing” in the universe of marketing.

Of course, I don't accept the world of advertising and self-help yet I know that “making best of the now” is the form which must be overcome for new social relations to create themselves. The exposition of revolutionary theory is inseparable from the revolutionists' concept of the pace of revolution. A theory that requires long study is only applicable to a revolution that will happen over many years – such an

The development of history hasn't been merely a sad tale of us losing quality nor the exciting tale of our gaining rational understanding. It has involved both. A workers' movement which aimed for the orderly transition of the working class to the dominant class has been destroyed with no prospect of recovery. What remains is the prospect for an explosive transition – to communism, to madness, to the end of humanity. Thus revolutionaries need to find a means to directly express their program in the most compact fashion possible.

Any particular production process, as developed by capitalism, moves from piecemeal creation to the filtering and combining of an existing stream of information (information

being fundamentally the result of human labor). Revolutionary process should naturally take part in this evolution.

The system produces an ever-widening gulf between what is possible in human relations and what is realized. The Internet shows this gulf floridly. It is now clear that we aren't limited in our ability to send information but by our inability to create a language describing the system and its negation.

The progress of the means of production under capitalism thus

Against Sleep And Nightmare

involves the production process becoming more dialectical. One process may supplant another. Further advances may make the original factories valuable once again. But naturally, this advance everywhere results in missed possibilities and potentials. Revolutionary theory takes part in this.

Some limits and possibilities of present-day agitation can be seen in publicists who set-off Boston's Homeland Security alarms with neon Adult Swim ad machines. The entrepreneur and the revolutionary each would follow the spirit of the present age. The entrepreneur wishes to profit from staying safely within what is permitted. The revolutionary wishes to extend the logic of the present system beyond what it can handle. At best, each is inspired by the Taoist theme of following the energy of the present moment and expecting that eventually the energy of this society will lead to its downfall.

A Texture Of Revolutionary Possibilities

Ostrinski explained the organization of the party, the machinery by which the proletariat was educating itself. There were "locals" in every big city and town, and they were being organized rapidly in the smaller places; a local had anywhere from six to a thousand members, and there were fourteen hundred of them in all, with a total of about twenty-five thousand members, who paid dues to support the organization. "Local Cook County," as the city organization was called, had eighty branch locals, and it alone was spending several thousand dollars in the campaign. It published a weekly in English, and one each in Bohemian and German; also there was a monthly published in Chicago, and a cooperative publishing house, that issued a million and a half of Socialist books and pamphlets every year. All this

was the growth of the last few years – there had been almost nothing of it when Ostrinski first came to Chicago. Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Sinclair/TheJungle/>

The snow on high mountains has a complex structure. After each snowfall, the heating of the sun and cooling of the night creates a hard layer of ice on the top of the drift. This crust melts more slowly than the underlying snow. After several snowfalls, these layers accumulate. As a person walks on the snow, they break the surface. Once they break the surface, they can land on a deeper layer. They may stop here or they may break this too, with momentum and friction interacting to produce unpredictable results.

The possibilities of fundamental change today have been covered now by many layers of snow. Revolts break through one layer of repression, only to be corralled by another. The momentum of revolt may expand through several layers but then the friction coming out of the resulting confusion stops further progress.

So breaking out of the drifts is going to be an adventure. We can deduce some of the boundaries that revolution faces from the very structure of society but we must discover others by trial and error. We sometimes discover the kind of force needed to break through these barriers by observing the movement of revolutionary forces.

The world ushered in by modern industry was the beginning of a reality where human activity continuously altered the very landscape that human beings tread on. The surface structure of this world has been completely transformed several times over (by train, automobile, steel, television, the internet). What has sadly stayed the same is the logic of the transformation itself (well outlined by Marx) – we remain slaves to wage labor, all of our activity becomes a product to be reshaped by the marketplace. And naturally this means a

world transformed into an alien object.

In our circle of revolutionaries, we are sometimes described as "Marxists", sometimes as "Left-Communists" and sometimes as "Situationists". In this circle, there is a tension between liking the Situationists and emphasizing the weaknesses of the groups inspired by them (a faith in democracy, a centering on the art world, councils and a tenuous critique of self-management). Today, those labeling themselves Marxist seem like earnest historical re-enactors. Those influenced by the Situationists might seem contemporary but are just as obscure.

For the would-be revolutionary, the Situationists in particular are crucial for translating the concepts grappled with by Marx into the conditions of the mid-twentieth century. But seeing that we are living in the early twenty first century, as the march of capitalist progress continues willy-nilly, revolutionaries cannot be satisfied with "invariance" but must grapple further with the challenges the SI confronted.

Each day, the contradictions of the massive constructs about us accelerate, whether in social peace or in social war. Budget deficits shift from the billions to the trillions, the real estate bubble is handed off to the hedge fund bubble and then collapses completely – etc. Dealing with these conditions involves surfing on top of this transformation process. Play is the only approach that can easily be processed through today's information stream.

Rackets

For a while now, it has been obvious that the present world is built on rackets. Lately, as these rackets fail, because they *are* failing, it is becoming easier to call them for what they are. The last five years are something of a numb blur. The housing bubble actually determined the work, the hopes and the beliefs of a fair portion of America as well as Britain and even Eastern Europe. (And in this same period, the workers not sucked into the housing game have been just too tired to

notice the changes in America).

Writing in early 2010, I can so far only imagine that this crazy churning of life may actually create a wake-up call. There is a moralistic tendency to loudly say “the system won’t fall apart by itself, workers/anarchists/poor-people/good-people will have to choose to destroy it”.

Well, the system won’t turn itself into something that we would want, certainly. But the system will tear itself apart quite nicely with or without our help. We are living in a self-destruction machine. This trajectory will be drastically altering the context of our lives whether we like that or not, whether we are mature enough to take it or not. This system generates the crisis that throws each person toward either collective resistance or individual despair. The strategy of individual survival indeed does not undermine the system but rather makes the wheels move faster. And the faster moving wheels of capital bring on a new crisis at an increasingly rapid rate.

Our situation does not follow a comforting path that invites just moral equations. Instead, the history of our era is an irreversible process of technological, human and cultural transformation. The controlling framework of the present regime remains the same but the conditions are altered constantly. They are not altered at random but to make the game work better for the rulers. Yet this efficiency fights itself. As just one example, we discovered recently that being able to create a bigger, cleverer Ponzi scheme did not make the rich sit more securely at the end of the day.

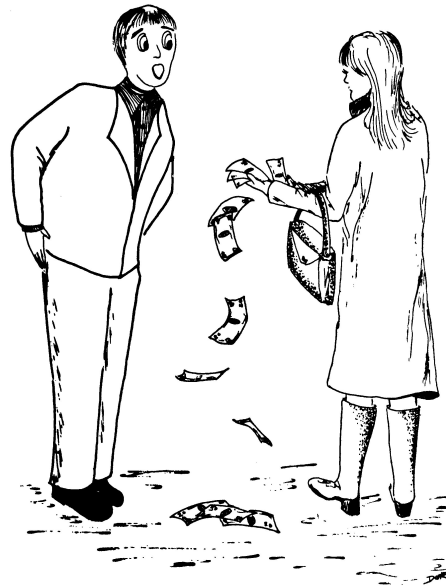
The market place simulates a flow. It demands flexibility from all – in consumption, production, investing and existence. Yet any such increase eventually stops bringing any benefit, once the standard has been reached. Thus, in the market, all things are considered like water, flowing in a controlled, predictable and infinitely divisible fashion – however unrealistic that assumption is. And capital must not

only keep the flow going but increase it continually.

So the only question is whether the human beings in this machine refuse this fluidity or whether they simply fail. Thus we wind up with a complex process of one crisis piled on top of another piled on top of another...

Untimely Meditations

Public opinion in Germany seems almost to forbid discussion of the evil



and perilous consequences of a war, and especially of one that has ended victoriously: there is thus all the more ready an ear for those writers who know no weightier authority than this public opinion and who therefore vie with one another in lauding a war and in seeking out the mighty influence it has exerted on morality, culture and art. This notwithstanding, it has to be said that a great victory is a great danger. Human nature finds it harder to endure a victory than a defeat; indeed, it seems to be easier to achieve a victory than to endure it in

such a way that it does not in fact turn into a defeat. Of all the evil consequences, however, which have followed the recent war with France [Franco-Prussian War, 1870-1] perhaps the worst is a widespread, indeed universal, error: the error, committed by public opinion and by all who express their opinions publicly, that German culture too was victorious in that struggle and must therefore now be loaded with garlands appropriate to such an extraordinary achievement. This delusion is in the highest degree destructive: not because it is a delusion — for there exist very salutary and productive errors — but because it is capable of turning our victory into a defeat: into the defeat, if not the extirpation, of the German Spirit for the benefit of the “German Reich.” **Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations***

ASAN has been published irregularly over the last fifteen years. I am not concerned about this irregularity. My aim has been to publish when I believed that I could put forward an original perspective. Ideally, if nothing is really happening in capitalist society, I don’t have any reason to just put out more verbiage.

Certainly, my understanding and my position has evolved over this time. Some of my initial formulations were rather crude and I may still lack subtlety in some of my formulations. But I am still happy to put forward the idea of strategic communication. Strategic communication involves imagining communication as part of a total war against the present order. In the midst of a conventional battle, a commander must make constant, small adjustment to his plan as he receives the news of events. He must adjust as new possibilities appear and possibilities he imagined vanish. The adjustments must be made since the haze of battle makes any

Against Sleep And Nightmare

particular piece of information uncertain and any determined attack requires time to complete. We stragglers in capitalist society do not have a single commander but rather must be our own commanders. We must move agilely as history unfolds non-linearly.

With Hitler's invasion, the Party line changed in a split second from the "Yanks are not coming" to "Open a second front now." The League of American Writers, the League Against War and Fascism, and all similar front organizations were dissolved, with no warning to their members or even officers. Eventually the Communist Party itself "dissolved" and called itself the Communist Political Association. Only the inner core remained. This, of course, fooled nobody. Browder was immediately let out of

prison and became a consultant to the White House brain trust. **Kenneth Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel***

Kenneth Rexroth's autobiographical novel gives a crucial picture of the end of the American left as an autonomous force with something to offer proletarian activity. The various strands of the broad left evolved and then were corrupted by Stalinism. We use labels and structures to give a convenient illusion of continuation to capitalist reality. In reality, capitalist production transforms the fundamental nature of the apparently fixed objects around us – especially the social phenomena. The meaning of demonstrations or "reform" or voting changes.

To say this is not to say that the original was not problematic. Before Stalinism, leftists of various stripes adapted to their position within capitalism, using

ostensibly revolutionary positions as justifications for actions which strengthened their relative position in capitalism as artists, union organizers, politicians, social workers or occasionally workers.

back or hoping that previous mistakes can be reversed – since history can have mistakes only once and then only has tendencies. We live on the other side of this *great divide*, which is not getting smaller but larger.



Rexroth makes the point that many intellectuals who joined the original American Communist Party did so hoping to take control away from the Stalinists rather than based on agreement with the Stalinists. But such intentions were tossed to the wind by the need for a unified organization.

However, we need to keep in mind that the explicit Stalinist takeover was a result of the inherent weaknesses of the left. The history of capitalist society has involved those implicit weaknesses and informal corruptions of previous societies becoming explicit, calculated systems. None of the elements of what we now call "Bureaucracy", "Stalinism", "the Spectacle", "recuperation" or whatever are new. The newness only appears since these methods have become systematized and reproducible on a larger scale.

For this very reason, there is no going

In August, 2007, the stock market destroyed the strategy of Wall Street's programmed traders. Since then, not only has the pattern of stock market trades stopped resembling the past patterns which computers had been programmed to expect, the programs' efforts to compensate only made the pattern diverge further – ultimately the beginning of the chaos and seizing up, which I predicted in my previous issue, *Return Of The Crisis*. (Insert a caveat here: we are never certain this effect will be a cataclysmic crisis - state and secret interventions can stop the chaos up to a point, etc).

The praxis offered by most would-be revolutionaries is, if anything, more rigid than the behavior of the programmed traders. At best, in some varieties of anarchism or "left communism" say, it tries to follow whatever past rebellions

Against Sleep And Nightmare

these folks happen to have learned about while at worst, with other varieties of socialism, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, it philosophically posits one ideological organization strategy based on airtight reasoning or fixed categories exempt from any consideration of past or current conditions.

The world looks profoundly different if you consider your vantage point as akin to the position of a football linebacker. Where each of the players is is uncertain but, more importantly, the play itself is uncertain and must be deduced from the position of the opposing players. This contrasts with the point of view that people fall back into when reasoning from isolation – here, in isolation it is easy to imagine change as happening in terms of “one person telling two people telling four people...” and the capital system standing still as a counter-plan is erected around it. In contrast to this, we should realize that each person is thinking logically already about the best way out of the mess, even as the whirlpool of capital draws them back into the mess.

To view ourselves as engaging in a battle is a way for us to sustain ourselves in the quagmire of capitalist society. It provides drama. As much as this society deprives us of nutrition in our food, exercise within our activity, it deprives us of meaningful drama in the trajectory of our lives. The concern with the lives of movie stars, athletes and rappers comes as an effort to regain this sense of drama.

Every trend today suggests that we are reaching a historical juncture. The question is whether those forces moving toward a different world can take advantage of this.

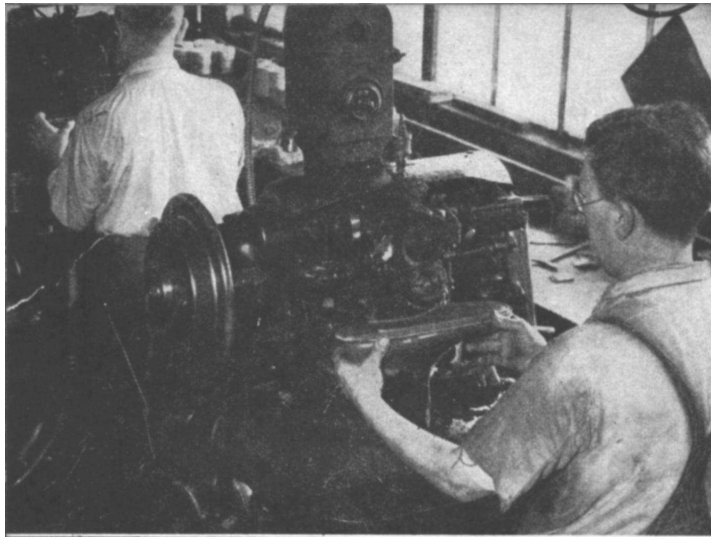
It may seem to be assuming much to call the system we imagine, of interpersonal relations beyond the present world, communism. But this is the best of the poor words which we could use to describe a process of supersession that is

also rooted in the historical experience of the dispossessed.

The present crisis situation brings to a head various contradictions. Some have existed for hundreds of years and others for thousands of years. So it essentially invites us to consider our fundamental conditions of existence like never before. At the same time, the present world produces a situation where many people simply do not consider their collective situation in any meaningful way.

Communism involves both going beyond the present conditions and returning to previous cycles. It is the end of pre-history and the beginning of history, the end of civilization and the expansion of production.

Capitalism already is superseding our biological condition. Communism naturally must extend this supersession. We certainly support those who might change their biological condition through altering the hormones that constitute gender. Yet a communist society would do more than let each person choose a



single identity among many, sexual or otherwise. It would open a journey of creation where both fixed and moveable identities could play. Considering that primitive society often superseded biology through the ingestion of psychedelic drugs, such a supersession may not be entirely technological driven.

There are a series of predictable ideas about what strategy a revolutionary

group should pursue. Even if a group does not intend to lead or organize a revolution, such a group certainly intends to hover about encouraging people and generally proving themselves well intentioned.

What is wrong with this? Should revolutionaries even want to be liked? Should they lead? Should they follow? Should they provoke? Should they produce order or chaos or simply know when to produce what? The Situationists International, which appeared and acted as a wave of revolutionary possibility, began as a mere murmur in the 1950s and crested in 1968. One crucial aspect of the Situationists is that they took up a different strategic position from that previously taken by the left – they refused dialogue, they aimed to be a “general staff without an army”.

Today, the historical waters do not flow calmly but whirl with a crazed choppiness. Our situation is seemingly hopeless yet not static. Still, being at square zero gives the luxury to consider

our strategies. We can carry our speculation beyond the models of either the Situationists or the traditional left.

The sky breaks open at just the point that one can unleash one’s imagination. Today, we are at an absolute historical juncture – whether you consider capitalism, civilization or biology, possibilities beyond the ordinary imagination are close at hand (whether these

possibilities will be delights or horrors is certainly still up in the air).

In accordance with this extreme juncture, we can and must bring to bear all the *strategic play* which humankind has dreamed-up in its encounters with the totality of historical fate. The thought of the workers movement is a part of this and so are *The Art Of War* the Zen Koans, the writings of Nietzsche, Freud

Against Sleep And Nightmare

and Reich, Cybernetics, internal martial arts and Neurolinguistic Programming, rap symbolist poets, and more.

My target audience cannot be those who need to have the horrors of this society explained step by step. They aren't worth talking to. Indeed, the naïve, "waiting to be convinced" Mr. Reasonable doesn't exist at all. The only thing that exists is people who take on this role for rhetorical effect. In reality, we all feel the effects of the present horrors. The people who claim to be enjoying things mainly are imagining later illusionary payoff and suppressing their present madness.

My target is those already seeking an end to the present madness, fellow seekers after pieces to this puzzle. Thus I imagine our communication is like the sharing of gems of insight between comrades in late-night brainstorming sessions. Just as much, I have no reason to repeat the very worthwhile ideas found in writings of Gilles Dauve or the Situationists, especially given the availability of the Internet.

What matters is what has changed in the last five years. But not in terms of particular events, many of which are just extensions of the same shit. Rather, what I look to is how the system has changed. We have an intuitive understanding of the subversive quality of, say, modern art, even as the reality of a real, successful artist reveals himself as contemptible. The avant-garde of communication are

simply those first to explore strategic communication, communication that jumps around the field of possibilities speaking to the entire person – which is to say speaking more to unconscious processes than to the "rational mind". By this token, modern art in a limited way

time – We shall see.



offered itself as a tool to capitalist ideology, from fascism to advertising.

Of course, such speculation is characteristic of this particular moment. Once an actual battle appears, things will be different and in the present chaotic stasis, such a battle could appear at any

The Modern Rings of Survival

.....
From the realism and the achievements of this splendid system one could already infer the personal capacities of the underlings it has produced. Misled about everything, they can only spout absurdities based on lies – these poor wage earners who see themselves as property owners, these mystified ignoramuses who think they're educated, these zombies with the delusion that their votes mean something.

How harshly the mode of production has treated them! With all their "upward mobility" they have lost the little they had and gained what no one wanted. They share poverties and humiliations from all the past systems of exploitation without sharing in the revolts against those systems. In many ways they resemble slaves, because they are herded into cramped habitations that are gloomy, ugly and unhealthy; ill-nourished with tasteless and adulterated food; poorly treated for their constantly recurring illnesses; under constant petty surveillance; and maintained in the modernized illiteracy and spectacular superstitions that reinforce the power of their masters. For the convenience of present-day industry they are transplanted far from their own neighborhoods or regions and concentrated into new and hostile environments. They are nothing but numbers on charts drawn up by idiots.

They die in droves on the freeways, and in each flu epidemic and each heat wave, and with each mistake of those who adulterate their food, and each technical innovation profitable to the numerous entrepreneurs for whose environmental developments they serve as guinea pigs. Their nerve-racking conditions of existence produce physical, intellectual, and psychological degeneration. They are always spoken to like obedient children – always willing to do what they're

told as long as they're told that they "must" do it. But above all they are treated like retarded children, forced to accept the delirious gibberish of dozens of recently concocted paternalistic specializations, which one day tell them one thing and the next day perhaps the very opposite.

Separated from each other by the general loss of any language capable of describing reality (a loss which prevents any real dialogue), separated by their relentless competition in the conspicuous consumption of nothingness and thus by the most groundless and eternally frustrated envy, they are even separated from their own children, who in previous eras were the only property of those possessing nothing.

Control of these children is taken from them at an early age – these children who are already their rivals, who laugh at their parents blatant failure and no longer listen to their simple-minded opinions. Understandably despising their origin, they feel more like offspring of the reigning spectacle than of the particular servants of the spectacle who happen to have begotten them, and think of themselves as only half-castes of such slaves. Behind the facade of simulated rapture among these couples and their progeny there is nothing but looks of hatred.

Guy Debord *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni (film soundtrack)*
<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord.films/ingirum.htm> – **the entirety bears reading...**

The Trajectory...

You roll out of bed and check the iLife strapped to your wrist. Water prices have gone down enough to let you take a short shower. But the only thing that jobmarket.com has for you today is grave-digging. The circuit design gig has been put off till Thursday since India's Internet is back up for two day.

But on Thursday, the gig is locked in and estimator.com says your income looks

good for the week. If the price of New Dollars holds up, you'll even be able to afford to move back into your own house by next Tuesday. Three people have bid for your sexual favors but their bids are low and the iLife has already rejected them. None of your sex-bids have been accepted either, though your ex-husband has offered you five credits to take the kids hiking on Saturday. You wonder if you will ever meet anyone. What would you say?

The iLife's screen flickers multiple colors as it sorts through more LifeScenariosTM. Healthdots.net has imposed a slightly upped dose of sedatives for the afternoon and the iLife has already sucked up the necessary chemicals from the local pipes. The TempRoom you've stayed for the last two nights is a bit dreary but it is well connected to the local ChemicalLines. The iLife reminds you that with only two more payments, you'll go from leave 2 to level 1 probation and wearing the monitor would become optional. You wonder what your wrist would feel like...

The Eaters Of Poison

(At the peak of the mission system's development) the mission padres had performed a combined total of 87,787 baptisms and 24,529 marriages, and recorded 63,789 deaths

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Missions

In the European conquest of North America, there were numerous instances of natives who died simply from their condition of domestication – not being acclimatized to conditions of servitude, everything from their immune system to spirits expired from the condition inflicted on them by their conquerors. Today, along with the many obvious stresses, the chemical industry invisibly fills our air and water with a variety of pollutants, some of which mimic sexual and other hormones. Our loss of self-

Against Sleep And Nightmare

generated culture and our dependence on an artificial culture synthesized by mass media is also invisible to us.

Given all of this, we need to keep in mind we are the survivors of a harsh and unrelenting regime. Human beings are intellectually, socially and biologically

adapting to current conditions in ways that we do not fully understand.

Certainly, we would-be revolutionaries are not the same as the heroic previous generation. The traditions that brought forth the IWW, The Second International, the Surrealists or the Situationists are gone for good or for ill. Whether

they call themselves the IWW, Pro-Situationists or Stirnerites, the major portion of all of today's would-be revolutionaries only link to previous traditions based on reading some fanzines or some Internet posts.

One idea I've tried to thread through the texts of this magazine is that the task of contemporary revolutionaries is to further transform our conditions beyond the present existence. We need to do this not by simply returning to the theories or the conditions of previous eras but by the entire dispossessed class transforming our weaknesses, the conditions of our existence, into strengths. I adopt this position not simply to have a cool Tai Chi kind of approach but because we can see that capitalism is continually transforming and so I conclude the only way out is transformation beyond it.



Immigration

Some time before the most recent round of anti-immigrant repression, maybe ten years ago, a given Mexican laborer who might come to America was often able (and to an extent is still able) to support an entire family and buy a retirement

home in Mexico on a minimum wage job. So working in the US for minimum wage was a good deal and a lousy deal rolled into one for them. Neither the left nor the right is willing to recognize the Hispanic chasing the (still ultimately

futile) American dream as a reality, each preferring a myth of either worthy oppression or evil criminality as the uniform condition of Latinos when the reality is that America is composed of different groups of people playing different shell games.

We shouldn't have a problem with Latinos coming to the US for "opportunity," even if such opportunities are often mirages. Capital's world of social survival hinges on a system where laborers at many different wage levels feel impelled to spend their entire wages on an augmented survival system. A house bought on credit, an unsustainable small business and saved money for college or retirement all hold out the possibility of a guaranteed place in the system.

These augmented survival systems divide the world like never before. Mobile phones speed the race for survival for

nearly all, from the apparently rich to the very poor. A cellphone is now a survival item for the homeless but it also makes it easier to be homeless and make a homeless person a more reliable worker. So the whole survival race today takes us in a spiral path. You get the same misery at a quicker pace.

And this augmented survival must be preserved in a variety of ways. The entire landscape has been reorganized to permit only working, shopping, driving and sleeping – the shopping mall, the industrial park, the freeway and the housing development. Sub-prime mortgages constitute a zone from which the rest of the financial system would like to protect itself just as the choices made by those who walked away from sub-prime mortgages must be hidden from those who still labor relentlessly to pay their mortgages.

We are all migrants on a landscape both desolate and filled with possibilities. This offers seduction as well as exploitation. This society survives because it seems to present some combination of survival and wealth later to just the right mix of citizens.

Flexibility

The ideology of free markets gives the impression that the average enterprise is concerned with being flexible and adapting. This is not true. The capitalist enterprise, on average, large or small, must be a rigid and controlled regime. The capitalist is a money maker. These "risk-takers" always aim for the minimal risk and maximal gain because they are putting their skin, their entire social existence, on the line.

The capitalist market indeed certainly creates risk but it is not capitalists who are expected to normally take this risk. Instead, we are. The leading edge of capitalism is in managing a workforce which is impelled to be more and more flexible. The product that the large urban areas offer is the adaptable workforce. The most flexible of the capitalists are simply those who buy the flexibility of



the most flexible workforce. No number of Spenglers, Schumpeters, Hayeks and Ayn Rands can train the bourgeois to a higher purpose beyond easy money. Money-bags instead has every incentive to just buy the skills and the materials he needs rather than being a

clever risk taker or manager - even if these skills might seem closer to the high bourgeois than the skill of brick laying. Indeed, in *The Economist* you can find “risk management services” for sale along side management talent. Of course, we can see how well the some of the

Madoffs feed off of this situation but it doesn't change the picture. The capitalist's position is like that of the police. While the policeman's job is to use violence to suppress many sorts of non-conformity to society's rules, they on average risk less on-the-job-injury than a bus driver. No one in a dominant position is going take a course of action on a day-to-day basis which risks the very conditions of their domination. The large corporations aim for some racket which guarantees reliable and predictable profits – and gets them, unless some crisis comes and washes their schemes away. Even the “start-up” realm is a casino where the small guys pay-in and the large investors are guaranteed a payoff at a certain point. A further wrinkle in this dynamic has been that capital has still relied on the upper segments of the proletariat to buy its goods despite the massive pressure that it simultaneously puts on us/it. Thus we see the continuously escalating credit bubble – first coming from Wall Street and now possibly being revived through the massive bailout.

Flexibility itself today is thus a two edged sword. From the 1960s and before, the working class' resistance to the capitalist order has involved becoming flexible enough to live in the intestines of the capitalist beast. From bums to bohemians, those who never worked often labored hardest to escape capital's control. But this same flexibility has been harnessed by capital when it has needed to increase the rate of exploitation. It is our immediate experience of economic development and collapse as the two tendencies merge into one.

The Adventurer

If modern capital divides us as wage workers into a variety of skill and consumption tiers, it is unifying us by the travails it puts us through. Janitors and graphic designers are equally obligated to pump their gas and remove the viruses from their own computers. Here is where flexibility is the name of the game.

Against Sleep And Nightmare

The problem is that this flexibility now serves the economy and not our interests. This attitude of minimally-consuming self-reliance was once a hallmark of bohemia but it is now becoming more and more universal, while less and less exciting. While the model of the young adventurer might not fit thirty or forty-somethings very well, the condition of the capitalist economy is offering fewer and fewer alternatives. Earlier bohemians grew old but sometimes their skills and connection were sufficient to maintain them into active old age. Odysseus returned from his travails and lived in contemplation. Now, *Time Magazine* proclaims “you may never retire”. The adventurer of today simply continues indefinitely in an empty now.

Hence, all marketing is youth marketing in the sense that all marketing moves the consumer closer to an infantile demand for immediate experience.

Modern capitalist society modifies the contours of daily life for its purposes;

our pre-built culture becomes more and more a youth culture.

Thus our purely atomized consumer makes choices in an infantile, a-historical now. Death and old age are non-existent. Each individualized individual longs for an adventure taking them to far places or to the ideal lover.

Thus we see an entire society with no thought of the future. We can congratulate America since it is one society which deserves no future. Yet we can also see the horror felt by those growing old in isolation.

Survival

The first phase of spectacular society was the phase of the destruction of the means of outlining the communist program within the language of capital. The triumph of the spectacle has

manufactured a world in which, except on unique occasions, every sort of permitted speech can be translated into statements about the management of the existing exchange system.

In this world, the undermining of the dominant discourse has become more resonant than any ostensible Revolutionary Speak. This is the system's own detournement – the most powerful statement is a collage of present “evils” and “goods” subjectively expressing their unity at a glance despite our objective inability to do so. Except in those



periodic moments of break-down, there is a near total disconnect between any objective articulation of opposition and subjective experience of opposition. And subjective opposition to this dominant world thus must be everywhere.

And now, we can hypothesize that spectacular society has moved to a further level of social decay. As current miseries cannot be hidden, the atomization of human existence prevents social communication. The individual is further divided within themselves. We face complex pressures that we can survive only with a kind of managed schizophrenia. And here the ultimate state of the modern person lies. We are beyond conscious of ingredients needed to maintain the illusions which allow us to survive. In this schizophrenia, the qualitative question of whether you see

through the illusions is replaced by the quantitative question of how much you are willing to take. Thus, we can map the conditions of the modern person by how they manage this division.

Modern Americans in particular are divided within themselves. Hyper-competent and wholly incompetent, active and passive – sometimes in the same person, sometimes in different people. From Urban Shamans driving SUVs to welfare mothers supporting Sara Palin to Marx-quoting vulgarians, the matrix of identities is more arbitrary. The

rise of bicycle messenger bags and vegan computer programmers, the rise and quick fall of metrosexuals, the homeless with laptops and cell phones, all speak to a constantly increasing flexibility, a flexibility which at first can seem to benefit us but which ultimately allows capital to transfer its problems and crises to us. This situation was characteristic of the earlier petite bourgeois. But in a world where capital attempts to move the maximum risk down to the working class, it spreads it

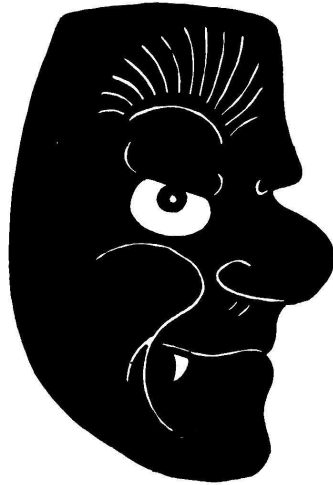
more and more widely.

For us, we have no sentimental need to regain earlier forms of capitalist exploitation (permanent jobs, etc.). Rather, we are curious what happens when this roller-coaster goes all the way to the end. Certainly, we identify less and less with the job we happen to have for a moment. On the other hand, we are connected with our ability to survive the social factory. And this social factory is the endless uncertainty of chunks of labor power attempting to sell themselves - chunks of labor trying to get paid. And just as much, this process involves navigating attitudes and connections, even for positions like taxi driver, carpenter or waiter.

This comes as the process of atomization has caused interpersonal roles to join the market place for capital. The decade and

Against Sleep And Nightmare

century-long movements for Gay Liberation, Women's Liberation, Black Liberation and a host of others have boiled down to the ability of every gender and culture to sell itself. This has also resulted in the less recognized roles and identities being made to wait in the wings for validation – a margin within marginality itself. In the world of capitalism's "war of all against all" few identities are neutral. When your condition stops being an advantage, it becomes an disadvantage – and vice versa. Moreover, your membership in your role needs publicity. In every role, there is the uncertainty of "passing". We may be only somewhat concerned if we don't pass as a customer when we walk into an expensive jewelry shop but we may be quite worried if we fail to be recognized as a man or as a woman when interacting socially. Gayness and its hipness is not an advantage for just anyone who has sex with those of the same gender. But it can be for those who can represent themselves best with the gay flag. In other circles, homophobia is applied to anyone who doesn't satisfy the heterosexual normal of middle America. Only a small minority of people can pass perfectly in all of the social roles that they might want to appear in. A large number pass with some worries while others simply fail. But since there are many nooks for each person, each of us can experience the feeling of being frauds, of failing to pass, of not meeting some of the "job description" that we use to construct our self-image. When the universality of this experience is recognized, a different community can appear. A community that denies capital's war of all against all finally can allow a self-acceptance that no amount of "dignity programs" can match. The advertising of this age naturally



projects a fantasy of paradise but such a paradise is particular to this age and the method of advertising; all of the immediate pleasures of the senses are laid out in a quick montage. Such a paradise might seem to actually happen to the celebrities at the center of the largest parties.

- Basically, the ideal of existence is an ad-hoc series of stunning actions – this is the adventure that remains within the present age. It is natural that this chic of being on the edge has been digested into a homogenous youth culture.

A laundry list of ways to NOT get followed on Twitter:

- **By not using your real name. I'm talking to you, socmed14413 and flygrrl182.**
- **By not using an actual photo of you (like your logo or something). Or worse, by not adding a photo at all.**
- **By not providing a link. We're not convinced. We want to find out a bit more about you before following. If you don't have another link to provide, write a blog or join LinkedIn and come back later.**
- **By not providing a "one line bio". Think of this as your answer to the question "why am I interesting?" Leaving it blank gives people no reason to follow you back.**
- **By calling yourself a "social media expert". Even if you are one. Everybody on Twitter calls themselves a social media expert. After all, they do have a Twitter account.**

Let's help these folks out. What else you got?

<http://www.darowski.com/tracesofinspiration/2009/05/26/how-to-use-twitter-and-not-be-a-douchebag/>

Exchange for the sake of producing more exchange value relation was old when Karl Marx described capitalist society. Images divorced from representation existed long before Guy Debord described capitalist society. What characterized these two phenomena is the way in which certain behaviors go from a background position to being socially dominant.

The automation of social representation has gone along with that representation detaching itself from the concrete social relations which underlie it. The spectacular relations involve both a simulation of social interaction and a process of capitalizing (on) those social interactions. Once highly valued speech, music or images can be detached from the individuals who generate them, they integrate into both control systems and the exchange economy.

The Internet naturally only intensifies this tendency. The world of the Internet involves intensive mutual self-surveillance as well as assigning exchange value to information.

Adaptation

We have to dig our way to the bottom before we can dig our way out of this mess. It is easy to denounce the dehumanizing qualities brought on by increasing traffic, constant cellphone conversation, work that both speeds up and bleeds into our "free" time. But we also need to discover how the present "flexibilized" workforce can be a more effective enemy to capital than the organized factory workers who came before them. Otherwise, our struggle will simply be a repetition of previous failures – with capital using all its new tools along with the recuperation and repression of times past.

So who are the modern citizens? "Bike messenger chic" first appeared with a group of casual workers who needed to modify their clothing to adapt to heat and cold: the messenger's image as the adventurer of casual work. They combined pleasure and survival by doing

Against Sleep And Nightmare

a grueling job which kept them in excellent shape and led to adventures and parties (for as long as the messengers remained in their twenties).

It is natural that capital wants laborers who have no past or future, who do the required activity and can be “on to another adventure”, with capital having no responsibility for the worker’s survival in that further adventure, especially no qualms about the workers becoming old, injured, etc.

The wearers of messenger style bags get a chance to take part in this chic, but with all the rough edges worn off. The cell phone replaces the CB radio – the universal tether of a present worker as opposed to the particular tether of the old times. Experiments in quick access to documents have shaped a bag now holding telecommuting laptops.

Historic capitalism began with medieval society, numerous hereditary classes, from kings and popes to squires, village priests and burgers, all arrayed above the peasantry. As capital dissolved these fixed class hierarchies, it established the social role, the changeable position which could be occupied by anyone. An enterprising individual may occupy many roles as their position in the labor market changes. Social roles have multiplied even as we each uniformly face the market place with nothing to sell but our labor power.

Modern citizens, those above the very bottom, are today asked to play a greater and greater number of roles today. These are most often simply paid positions within the economy, but they also include unpaid positions. They include friends, but also roles of “oppression”. You can be a “red neck” writer, a drug-addict college professor, a student and a prisoner, etc. Thus, in a given day, we wind-up playing a series of roles, some thin and surface, some deep and closely held (of course these roles are more muted).

Past upheavals have allowed capitalism to become a more streamlined capitalism, spiraling inwards. In producing a realm

of fused work and consumption, capital created work-roles which strongly implied a linked level of consumption. The accumulated individual rebellions of the 1960-90s produced many who would refuse the producer/consumer role which their producer role mandated for them. These were the modern survivalists, putting together lives from thrift stores. But as an individual response to a collective problem, these responses constituted both a bit of passive resistance and an opportunity for capital. We have an unending fight between the dispossessed’s efforts to create space for themselves and capital’s ability to recuperate all partial resistances. Bike messenger bags or cell phones are neither good nor bad.

The rise of capitalism resulted in the gradual simplification of ruling and ruled classes. The complex feudal mesh of social obligation was gradually torn to shreds. Class as a condition that one was born into faded as the world was divided into two economic classes – the capitalist class and the dispossessed class.

A Fragmentary Panorama Of Revolutionary Possibilities

The Historical Trajectory Of Communist Theory...

The International was founded in order to replace the Socialist or semi-Socialist sects by a real organization of the working class for struggle. The original Statutes and the Inaugural Address show this at the first glance. On the other hand the Internationalists could not have maintained themselves if the course of history had not already smashed up the sectarian system. The development of the system of Socialist sects and that of the real workers' movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other. So long as the sects are (historically) justified, the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historic movement. As soon as it has attained this maturity all sects are essentially reactionary. Nevertheless what history has shown everywhere was repeated within the International. The antiquated makes an attempt to re-establish and maintain itself within the newly achieved form." Karl Marx, Letter To Friedrich Bolte, New York, November 23, 1871, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_11_23.htm

Marx pronounced the uselessness of sects in 1871 in the context of the upsurge of the First International. However, the International itself failed to maintain this upward trajectory. So, on the one hand, Marx's denunciation of sects was appropriated by Lenin into an argument for a totalitarian state capitalism. On the other hand, the proletariat itself certainly failed to make the linear progress that would allow the statement to be conceivably true today.

Revolutionary theory aims to comprehend the frontier between the

progress of capitalism and the progress of its real and potential negations. The production system generates those who must sell their labor for social survival as well as physical production workers facing "good, old-fashioned" physical survival. Capital generates a large number of information workers and "professionals". Some forces move these people towards rebellion and others move them towards merely extending capitalist social relationship in a "progressive" fashion. The lurch to crisis throws the most dispossessed into the streets and makes the survival of the higher sectors tenuous.

The purely subjective revolt of "everyone" has its most horrible manifestation in "Orange Revolutions" and similar events. A purely subjective rebellion of civil society may seem to have destroyed "all authority" yet cannot create anything and cannot act for itself. The "objective" perspective that looks towards "productive" workers is a slowly fading approach that cannot go beyond the high point of Stalinist Russia (despite the revival of fundamentalist Marxism alongside the other "fundamentalisms").

So, I am indeed saying that there can be different rebellions which might involve some of the same people but have different content. Indeed, today there is no doubt that the working class is organized, is communicating, is aware of many things and is even often managing itself. Our lack of collective power means that we are unaware of ourselves and thus only managing capitalist relations. But what this means is this self-organization is happening in the most unconscious fashion possible. Working class people, of whatever definition, are on the Internet, talking about every imaginable question – nearly always from the point of view of the best way of the manage capitalism.

The position that capital generates a

purely subjective rebellion is one natural duality within the bifurcation of Marxian analysis. It is taken up more vulgarly and systematically by academics like John Holloway or Moishe Postone even than by the Situationist International. The magazine *Aufheben* has often debated the question of proletarianization. Despite going into great Marxological depth and marshaling quite reasonable arguments, I feel my friends at *Aufheben* fail to look at the historically specific qualities that the working class and the proletariat take.

If the question could be solved by simply finding the best definition, then we're at loggerheads. Both the "autonomist" and the "traditional" definition have their problems. Professionals are "proletarianized" in the sense that their activities have become generic – a computer, a supervisor, meetings to go to, rhetoric to craft, etc. and also in the sense that the income they make is necessary to maintain their social position.

Is the economy driven by the accounting of "generalized" survival or by plain-old survival? With generalized survival, we can expect class struggle throughout the world. With simple survival, we would expect class struggle to concentrate in China with the US being a virtually a "bourgeois society". Now, my point isn't that one or another measure is true while all the others are false. Each plays a part in the unfolding dynamics of crisis-driven capitalism.

We proletarians slip from one position of survival to another. Always there is some resistance to this slippage but this resistance does not always take an identical form. When this resistance becomes collective action, capital faces a crisis. As the collective action of a crisis substitutes communist relations for capitalist relations, the challenge will be to create a power which is entirely beyond the reasoning of merely regaining



lost ground.

We can see the “multi-tiered” struggle that happened in Argentina – the middle class demanding money, the working class demanding jobs and the poor demanding food. This constituted a power which did not effectively tackle the newest form of crisis capital while it reached the end of previous struggle forms. The 2009 revolt in Iran, where “people,” especially middle class people, stand up for one faction of the Islamic Republic, shows the ability of the Spectacle's forces to get out of hand.

The evolution of modern capitalism has transformed the conditions of the classes within it tremendously but cannot end the reality of the dispossessed within capitalist society. It is simply the flip side of the freely available labor power that capitalist production depends on.

If the working class are those with bare survival wages, then their number

has fluctuated over time. If the working class is industrial workers, then their numbers first grew and now have shrunk. If the working class is all those who must sell their labor power to survive on some level – all wage laborers – then their numbers have grown and grown (and moreover, their number were significant before the dawn of the capitalist era).

Again, everywhere, we see tendencies which the 19th century revolutionary saw as a progression actually occurring in cycles instead. While we have seen many cycles of advance, the dispossessed have certainly not progressively advanced their conscious level of coherence and organization.

Despite Marx’s instructive descriptions of capital continuously revolutionizing both the means of production and society in general, the original workers’ movement, of which Marx and Engels were a part, assumed

that capitalist society had fairly fixed boundaries. So this tendency saw commodity relation as taking place within the fixed bounds of “civil society”. This viewpoint can be seen most clearly in Marx and Engel’s illusion that the working class could capture the machinery of American democracy.

However, as capitalist society has developed, the process of marketization has corroded away any such boundary within capitalism itself or within the outside world. Everything is for sale, including illusions about money itself.

For the classical theorists, one crucial boundary of capitalist society has been the distinction between the industrial worker, the service worker and the professional.

The most specific prediction of Marx for the future of capitalist society was that the industrial working class would become socially and numerically the

Against Sleep And Nightmare

dominant class. This scenario has not come about. There is currently no nation on earth with an industrial working class comprising more than fifty percent of the population.

The rise of capitalism in the 19th century was both the rise of both a particular and an abstract, self-reproducing system. The more that this society undermines all of our immediate assumptions, the more it strengthens the fundamental order:

capital – the buying of generic labor power for the reproduction of a greater mass of generic labor power.

The vanishing of previous assumptions and previous resistance has left our fundamental dispossession unchanged. The rise of a generic system naturally provoked Marx's understanding of Capitalism within dialectics, arguably a 19th century equivalent to system theory. But naturally, this theory was unfinished and could not be finished before the end of capitalism itself.

The more general prediction, that wage labor would become the dominant relation, has indeed come about. In capitalist nations, those who must work for money to survive in the larger sense have become the vast majority. In looking at my non-definition of class, I wish to extend this process. I can see how capitalism has tended to suppress the role of the worker in the sense of pure production worker. I would accept the analysis of the Situationists and the ultra-left that the interests of said worker-as-worker indeed tend to be served by the mediation of a Stalinist left (since this is the worker who specifically won't stop being a worker even in a "workers' state").

So what has happened to the proletariat-as-dispossessed and what has happened to the potentials of anti-capitalist organizing? I claim that they

follow a similar fractal path. The proletariat simultaneously is utterly crushed and possesses increasing organizing ability and increasing potential organization (with the chasm between the potential and the real yawning always). Just as much, capital forces as great a portion of the proletariat as possible into an entrepreneurial position but one which cannot be maintained during the periods of

collapse, collapse which itself happens on a more frequent and, especially, more extreme basis.



Certainly, the cataclysmic unfolding of the many potentials in alienated labor provides us with the many awe-inspiring and nightmarish scenarios visible in the present world. We can see the situation of Argentina, where, due to the collapse of banks, the middle classes neither joined the revolutionary movement nor supported the state. Interestingly, one would find much less cultural distinction between lower and middle class in the US than one would find in Argentina. Further, in the US, the middle class, or middle stratum, has no assets but rather lives on credit.

Another point is that we are not looking at this morally. The "productive classes" today, in the sense of being the rising and powerful section of the working class, is not the industrial worker but the information worker, the system administrators who keep the most advanced infrastructure functioning. This is, of course, an even smaller group than the industrial working class even now.

We need to arrive at the answer through historical and theoretical analysis, that is to say dialectically. The answer that I would give is that in the diffuse world of today, the more

prosperous "middle class" wage earner is pulled various ways by various forces. Those forces will not be decisive until further storms arise.

Now, within all this, we can ask about the prospects of revolution. For the purely abstract, individual wage laborer, the logical path towards revolution is subjectivity. For the collectively organized and exploited industrial worker, the path to revolution is objective, collective organization. I can see the three paths to counter-revolution in Argentina: the Middle Class resentment of the bank customers, the self-management of factory workers, and the bought-off gangster of the Piqueteros.

In the evolution of possibilities, this same group came together to create a powerful upsurge. But in the evolution of such a historical event, such an event must constantly interrogate and overcome itself. The upsurge floundered on step two and this must be our lesson two.

So where will a professionalized American working class go in a crisis? Unlike Argentina, they can not demand their money since even the highest stratum live on credit. Moreover, the advance of professionalization both increases the numbers of professionals and decreases their wages. Capital unleashes more and more of this force, yet the quandary is how those fundamentally disposed by Capital can reach the stage of creating a social relationship which goes with this order. Certainly, they won't get there by working.

For not having a better conclusion, I don't necessarily see immediate action despite the immediate horrors moving us toward destruction. But we can expect that the system will impose deprivation and chaos on us at whatever rate we are willing to take and at an accelerating rate. By this token, I expect a breaking point to be reached sooner than a simplistic analysis would expect.

Even would-be revolutionaries fail terribly in considering the process of

accelerating change. Critiques of Marx or the Situationists or others seem to see a static world wherein you can pick or choose a series of correct or incorrect lines. The reality is that there are accelerating series of battles. These battles aren't hopeful or pleasant affairs – mostly they are the almost invisible process of reinforcing previous defeats. All previous revolts are covered with a hundred feet of ice as La Banquise implied. But just as much, a distinct subterranean world exists – bare, horrifying but beginning at the point where all else ends. However, the world of capital just as quickly experiences its crises. Our task is to be ready at the point revolutionary struggle appears out of this stew. But in this process, our task is to not be too far behind the struggle that appears.

Mathematically, a singularity is a point on a curve beyond which it is not possible for smooth changes in the slope to continue a process of change because these changes contradict themselves. There is no doubt the present order is approaching a singularity of one sort or another.

Theses On Production And Revolution

1. The manner in which a revolutionary tendency describes its theory should be inseparable from its understanding of the pace of revolution. A theory that requires long study is only applicable to a revolution that will involve a long movement happening over many years. Despite coming out of the spectacle's tendency to pure surface, sound bites are a natural part of any quick revolution.
2. The Situationists' sometimes crude identification of power, control, technology and capital is forgivable only by their approach of strategically theorizing – the fact that they situated their praxis within the immediate historical moment.
3. The later framework of capitalist production naturally encompass earlier frameworks. From the point of view of

information systems, any particular production process as developed by capitalism moves from piece-meal creation to the filtering and combining of an existing stream of information (information being fundamentally the result of human labor). The earlier move from craft production to mass production was only a partial example of this.

Revolutionary process should naturally take part in this move towards filtering. In 1987 when *The Simpsons* premiered, mainstream criticism had outpaced what passed for



radical thought. *The Robot Chicken* of 2006 outpaces even this. If there is anything *Robot Chicken* shows, it is that the mass media of the last thirty years has become more and more of a fire hose spewing the filtered totality of social existence back at us, adding only bits and pieces to the mix.

Capitalism itself has adopted the position of the Situationists in the sense that its leading edge is not about production but about the circulation of daily life. All art is detournement and mainstream art is recuperated detournement.

The Situationists often confused the form of production with its essence – seeing hierarchy, control, specialization, etc. as fundamental when they are just moments of capitalism's evolution. But what made them crucial was their practice of

strategic communication – seeing that revolutionary theory acts on the totality of society. To take seriously a partial theory is more critical than to academically exposit a total theory. The system produces an ever-widening gulf between what is possible in human relations and what is realized. The Internet shows this gulf floridly. It is now clear that we aren't limited in our ability to send information but by our inability to create a language describing the system and its negation. 4. The position that revolution proceeds explosively does not promise a quick, happy ending. It is simply an observation of the current time. It is a corollary of the observation that production moves from linear to non-linear.

One plausible scenario is that an explosion will set the stage for future struggles towards communism. We can look at all the dynamics of high-explosive chemical reactions for this investigation. The progress of the means of production under capitalism thus involves the production process becoming more dialectical while a coherent practice of dialectics become more difficult. One of these tendencies will eventually overwhelm the other.

5. In the first stage of the spectacle, every communication within civil society had effectively become a statement regarding the command and control of an unquestionable capitalism. Yet civil society itself was only fraction of total communication. The tension that has characterized the last forty years' history has been technology's expanding the possibilities of communication coming up against the expansion of market relations within all aspects of daily life.

6. The world today is a world in which the process of interpersonal communication has become more colonized than ever before by capitalist relations in general and the neoliberal order in particular. This modern regime might be called "the social factory" in the sense that labor in an automated, assembly-line-like setting has left the factory proper and

has moved to a world which aspires to organize the totality of social interactions with order similar to the order of the machine. It could be called the "virtual world" in the sense that production measured in number, weight, height and length has been superseded by production measured by information. Marketization colonizes the dreams of artists transformed into entrepreneurs. Every means of survival can be self-consciously used as a scheme for increases in the rate of exploitation. At the same time, this world puts whatever would-be revolutionaries are left in the position where we can directly communicate our positions, beginning with the need for unalienated relations.

7. The further evolution of a given production process often involves harnessing a number of its previous forms. But naturally, this advance everywhere results in missed possibilities and potentials. Revolutionary theory takes part in this. Marx only barely learned mathematics and this text's author has barely mastered Marx's writings.

Resistance...

An optimistic leftist might see daily life as small instances of resistance spread through every workplace and, every day, resistance that invisibly builds up to explosions on a regular basis. This is an appealing possibility. Certainly, no one submits utterly to the demands of bosses and bureaucracy, even the bosses and bureaucrats can't really follow their own logic. But looking at America in 2007, one would be hard-pressed to say that enough resistance was accumulating to create a collective refusal of the current conditions either inside or outside the workplace.

We can view the desperation of individual acts as a gauge of what we all put up with silently. It does happen that people spend their entire lives resisting. It happens more often that a person lives with a series of compromises, temporary treaties, reconciliations with the daily misery governing our lives - if I steal

enough coffee, I can get through the day, that house in country is my refuge from this insanity, etc. There are constant disturbances of this sleep; dreams of further possibilities appear but they usually leave us accepting the logic of the system. Even the feeling that a crisis could bring down the entire complex provides a comfort to some people today.

Some palpable spirit of opposition generally comes before any articulated positions or any visible acts. Everyday, we act on things that we do not have a certain argument for or against. Thus the next explosion can percolate in the banal office or factory. A critical strategy of resistance today needs to look for a spirit of resistance rather than calling for increased militancy or making rational arguments for the undesirability of this society. In reality, this is one of the most rational societies history has known. The rationalist can divide up the moments of this insanity and prove each step is sane. You are working at an absurd job and driving an hour each way to get there. But each step is justified - you signed the contract, you chose the car as the way to get there, you chose the little luxuries that keep you from saving any money. Freedom and responsibility dominate each moment despite the totality being insane. We are not interested in finding a better way to manage the present disaster called society - we are experimenting with which ways we can end it most quickly.

The explosions we do see today happen when those large and small compromises can no longer hold. Sometimes this happens spontaneously. Sometimes this happens when the system seems so weak that it tempts us to demand more. But this often happens when the system breaks its side of the bargain. Certainly, we can see more instances of that happening lately as the world economy implodes.

Spectacle And Abstraction

We live in a world of lies. Humanity drifts through a distorting field whose

complexity dwarfs all previous examples. From the ordinary prejudices of journalists we go to chaotic positions of bloggers and Internet rumors. Never have we had so much information and never has it been so suspect.

To unravel such a situation requires not just an effort to tell the truth but the difficult choices of which truth to look at first. The universal distortion certainly reinforces itself through the use of small truths in the service of large lies; politicians often doing well enough at analyzing problems that they have no hope of solving, each doing an excellent job at showing the problems of the alternatives, etc.

For us, the key entry point to begin our unraveling is history itself. The terrain on which all the other lies live is the belief that the present world is typical, things have always been like this and will always continue like this. The reality is that we human beings are moving on a steep and chaotic trajectory of accelerating history. In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles.

Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

Derek Sayer points out that Marx did not define class and other critical questions but rather allowed the definition of class to flow out of the entire historical development of capitalism. I could begin by defining some terms. I could begin by defining all terms. Just by virtue of being human beings, we are in the middle of a dialog. But in the current stage of history, we are in a dialogue and a historical conflict. So I have to rely on the abilities of you, the reader, keeping in mind that these are given by your history in capitalist society and as a human being.

That said, I aim to define those terms which I think people need. Such definitions naturally involve putting my own spin on these ideas - as always

Against Sleep And Nightmare

happens when one defines a complex concept. So, as I write, some old and new words may get a formal introduction while others will just appear on stage without fanfare. Such is the way of all theater.

Human language is both a game of sounds rearranged with complex rules and a process of *representation*, where a sequence of sounds can describe some other thing. What is abstraction? Language can describe particular details, the sights and sounds and material qualities of the world. Those parts of language which describe wider swathes of details are more abstract. Nouns like “the world”, “the nation”, “people”, “things” all bring us into the world of abstraction. But verbs lacking detail can also bring us into a realm of abstraction; “to act”, “to exist”, “to be” can be more abstract than “to walk” or “to hammer”. And naturally, this is hardly an adequate summary but rather a reminder for we humans who are already using language and using abstractions.

The spectacle is part and parcel of our modern world. Even if spectacular domination is not the fundamental problem in the society, it is worth noting how the present spectacular order involves signs which are circulating for themselves without effectively representing anything besides the importance of their users.

One crude example of a spectacular symbol is the Abercrombie and Fitch logo. This symbol literally stands for a company but it is “blurred together” with the implication that those sporting the logo have both money and “a certain attitude”. A given person might not feel all of these things but since “we” know that most others in this society feel one or another of these things, the overall mesh effect “works”.

When the lion roars, he isn’t representing anything else. Rather, he is presenting himself. The A & F logo fuses representation and presentation into a single process. Another example of a spectacular symbol is a phrase like

“national security”. Here, there is no particular company which owns the symbol and there is no single image which the user of the phrase automatically presents.

Now, the qualities which a spectacular sign uses are not, themselves, new to modern society. Like most animals, pre-humans began using sound primarily for presentation with representational speech evolving 100,000 years ago at least. After this, human speech has involved a fusion of representation and presentation.

One important factor to consider is how the movement towards abstraction can also be a movement toward presentational behavior. The impetus which I have for speaking of the spectacle now is that modern processes have been codified and to an extent automated to what was previously immediate tension between human beings. Capitalism is an abstract social system which automates and incorporates the previously haphazard behaviors of human beings.

A given group of birds might unify their community through maintaining a single tone in their call. Similarly, human presentation has a natural unity to it – the call to prayer of a Muslim village or the church bells of a medieval village presented the unity of the community. The spectacle is an automated process which attempts to regain that unity of the precapitalist village through a hum of “images detached from every aspect of life” which appear to “merge into a common stream” (though in comparison to coherent pre-capitalist life, it fails).

Now, an important aspect of this is that many abstract terms have naturally

become spectacularized. Indeed, it is natural for the terms for discussing the conditions of our life to be falsified to the degree to which they are critical.

To Put An End To Easy

Answers...

Amid the many horrors of the present era, I can feel a palpable inability among we would-be opponents of the system to act even slightly effectively against it. I see this less in the general inactivity than in the collective inability to produce any new understandings of the present era (with only the smallest exceptions).

... the ultra left continues to speak about the affirmation of the proletariat whilst witnessing the collapse, as a revolutionary movement, of everything that could mean the rising in working class power in the capitalist mode of production – a rising in power without which this affirmation becomes a completely empty project. Theorie Communiste (a fragment on the web at http://riff-raff.se/wiki/en/roland_simon/critical_foundations_for_a_theory_of_the_revolution/chapter_5/contents).



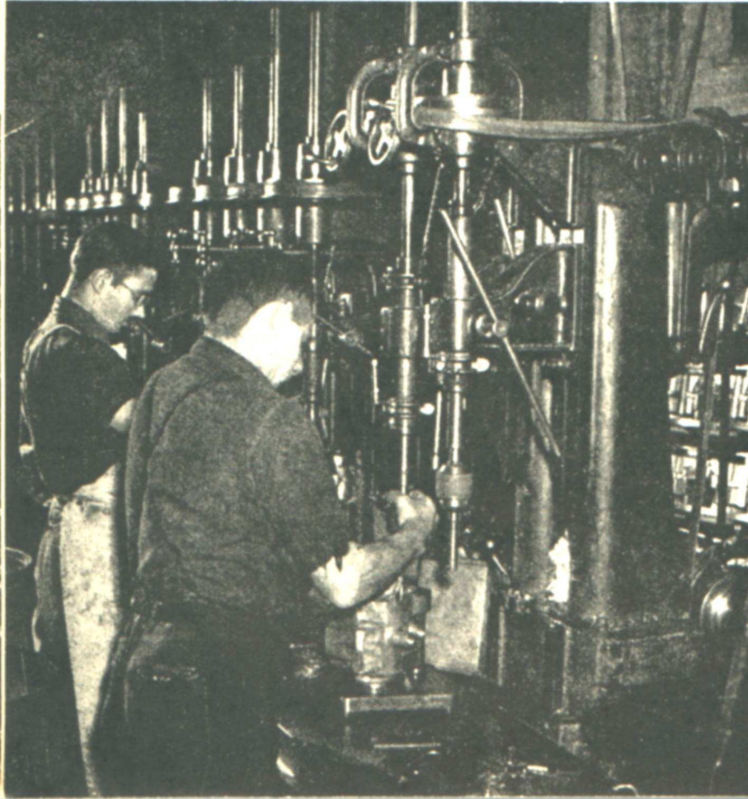
→ It is not the job of the revolutionary to provide an objective prediction about the likelihood of revolution. In any case, such predictions are presently impossible. What we might find, when present conditions are plugged into the best of our computers, is zero

divided by zero – an irresistible force meets an immovable object. The contradictions are piling up but won’t be

Against Sleep And Nightmare

calculated till the final round. The only task of the anti-capitalist revolutionary is to consider the tools, the tendencies and the tactics which might lead to a situation where the dispossessed and the capitalist class face each other more directly, where a more total struggle can happen – insert your favorite Sun Tzu or Clausewitz quote here.

Two hundred years ago, Karl Marx opened the field of the materialist analysis of society. The rejection of crude materialism and dialectical idealism in *Theses On Feuerbach* represented a point of departure in humanity's ability to consider its own condition, but this was also revealed to be simply a part of the evolution of human action in the world – specifically, the means of production reaching a historically unique level of self-modification. After this point, the only theory that merited the name was praxis – action on the historical stage. Equally, the evolution of human society has gone more



and more to the point where the only choice is between being a slave to ideology or being engaged in a lucid praxis authentically addressing the conditions of the world.

Looking at the present era, this insight has to be modified by an understanding of how the present era is the product of massive “counter-revolution”. These events, including the two world wars, were not a single program but rather a generalized approach which Kenneth Rexroth described as civilization's turning of its resources upon the destruction of its future possibilities. Thus, the present era has a prevailing despair far from the optimistic feeling

characteristic of the rise of capitalist society.

This situation remains true even as many aspects of the movement of which Marx was a part have faded. Indeed, while there's no obvious upsurge in world wide revolutionary activity lately, the self-destructive activity of capital leaves the choice of revolution or suicide just as poignant.

I have published the previous seven

issues of “ASAN” over the last twenty years or so. The late eighties were the very end of both the “affluent society” and any vision of a unified left. In my twenty years of publishing ASAN, an affirmative left has collapsed along with the Soviet Union. This collapse has certainly involved only a deepening of the working class' atomization and bourgeois-ization within capital.

I can see two general positions of an opposition. One projects a well defined working class which organizes for itself, as it is now, and eventually takes power in some form (either through a state or through workers councils). Another perspective looks at transforming the

roles that exist in this society – switching the conditions of life of all existing classes from the specialized, bureaucratic organization of life to a holistic existence.

Leninism as well as some versions of councilism and anarcho-syndicalism can be seen purely as part of the first tendency. But many tendencies involve both aspects. I once defined myself as “between the ultra-left and the

Situationist International” and associated with others who defined themselves with a similar “mix” of politics. The evolution of this milieu unfortunately has only been undesirable, with the politics becoming effectively an effort to have a similar position to the left without “vanguardism” or “authoritarianism”. As *Theorie Communiste* points out, such projects are likely to be nothing more than blowing on the dying embers of positive working class self-organization (certainly, vanguardism and authoritarianism aren't the issue. Substitutionism is closer but not quite it either).

Now, instead of being “between”, it would be perhaps better to place myself on the other side of the Situationist

from Left communism. This has nothing to do with agreeing with every position of the SI. Rather, the SI was close enough to the critical positions that they were a historical milestone. My goal, however foolish or pathetic, is to be part of a further milestone beyond this. While this might constitute the height of egotism, it comes also from the understanding that the only way out of the present debacle is to see it through all of its possibilities, to create a resistance which is both against and beyond the present regime – a supersession.

It is natural for some proportion of extreme leftist to read the SI, extol some of their virtues, talk about their excesses,

Against Sleep And Nightmare

make a few noises in the direction of Gilles Dauve and then go back to their *Capital* reading group. (At the time that *Fascism/Anti-Fascism* was published, its most salutary aspect was that its message simply could not be tolerated by the leftist social milieu, but things have shifted since then).

Empirically, one can guess that most groups of would-be revolutionaries will turn out to be worse than nothing in a revolutionary situation. It is worth remembering that the Situationists positioned themselves in the line of historical events as the supersession of not just Marx and Anarchism but also of Stirner and Nietzsche, Dada and Surrealism, as well as the cinema and the modern means of psychological conditioning. (Who says that we do not, like Nietzsche, look to the man of the future but look with a clearer vision than old Fredrick's syphilis-addled sight?) What matters is not simply a certain mix but a process of overcoming.

And, again, if this is taken as a claim to individual accomplishment, it forms a pathetic claim to stardom within the spectacle of historical accomplishment. If it is an invitation for the entire proletariat to take up this historical legacy, then it is simply a necessary call in a harsh time.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx's individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious 'orthodox' Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx's theses in toto – without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Georg Lukacs *What is Orthodox Marxism?*

The position of the SI is crucial to us, more crucial than the particular points of dialectical reasoning they might take. Reich, the scientist, for example, seems just one fumbling step in the long line of human research on sexuality and body-mind processes, the majority of which

seems to have been carried in pre-capitalist societies. It is debatable whether Reich made advances over the researches of Indian Tantra.

Yes, Reich the would-be revolutionary very correctly outlined the historical and even biological defeat that the possibilities of human community suffered in the early twentieth century. It seems a natural conclusion that in those areas of knowledge where science and *Ceteris paribus* can quickly unlock nature's secret, modern bourgeois processes have made notable strides, and equally in those areas roughly described in bourgeois terms as "psychology" or "sociology", science has failed to make progress or has even regressed.

Dreams, Transcendence ... Communism?

Motivation: Neuroses

Red Hughs on Libcom:

...The enjoyment of life, from the cooking of excellent meals to swimming at the beach to hanging with friends to sing-alongs, tends to involve participation rather than consumption... The point is that human activity would focus on mutual enjoyment rather than attempting to create a "better version" of the present world... (<http://libcom.org/forums/theory/capitalist-dad-vs-libcom-son-round-2-23022010#comment-367287>)

CantdoCartwheels:

So you want more and better karaoke machines, lots of readily available recipe e-books and cookery programmes on tv and better transport links so people can get to the beach quickly. (<http://libcom.org/forums/theory/capitalist-dad-vs-libcom-son-round-2-23022010#comment-367625>)

Red Hughs later:

Would your idea of paradise be more more iphones or sex on the beach? (not the drink). Or ... would you rather work 40 hour/week in a karaoke machine factory and do karaoke on the weekends or would you like to spend some time and learn how to sing? (and no, I don't know how to *sing* but I ought to...)

Imagine, you have a shift in a big collective kitchen. Everyone's there because they *like* to cook. If you're just starting out or even if you have some experience, someone else is happy to show you new techniques. Or if

everything's working, there is time to chat as you go. There's plenty of time since there are lots of cooks - since a lot of people like to cook, since it's pleasant. This "unproductive" in the sense that you could have a big factory spitting out hi-tech microwave gruel and save people time so they could make more karaoke machines. But as a total social relation, this is preferable.

Not all experience has to be pure unmediated joy or conveniently pleasant to do. But a large portion of activity could be a combination of those two. Factory and automation methods certainly would be preserved and they could be mobilized on the "minimize unpleasant toil" principle. (<http://libcom.org/forums/theory/capitalist-dad-vs-libcom-son-round-2-23022010?page=1#comment-367684>)

This exchange is a small but hopefully revealing part of the debate concerning whether a post-capitalist society would still require control mechanisms such as labor-time-vouchers to impel people to maintain or increase production. It has raged around the libcom.org discussion forums for some time. Red Hughs is myself. Continuing;

Mikus:

The fact of the matter is that while productivity has greatly increased since the 19th century, so have human needs, and so what we consider an acceptable standard of living has gone up dramatically. It's not at all clear that productivity is at such a level that we could just give everyone as much as they wanted and not tie consumption to production."

(<http://libcom.org/forums/theory/dread-ed-labour-notes-02042009?page=1#comment-325109>).

It is part of received wisdom of nearly every traditional culture that the road to happiness is finding inherent joy in some constructive activity, rather than becoming fixated on future goals and rewards: The fixation on gaining and losing things outside ourselves is one thing that keeps us stuck where we are.

Of course, through the course of the last 10,000 years of civilization, the purveyor of such insights have often used them to maintain their position in the social hierarchy rather than to create a human community expressing these possibilities.

Still, if a communist is not to be merely a democratic reorganization of the present misery, communism must find ways to transform both production and needs in a way that escape the endless ladder of today's commodity relations. What is interesting here in the discussion is not simply what kind of production a communist society would have but what seems like a kind of willful blindness to this idea, the idea that people could go from meeting their needs with external commodities to meeting their needs within their collective processes. In translating the *Tibetan Book Of The Book*, Chögyam Trungpa used the psychological term neurosis to describe the overall condition of being caught in the self-reinforcing world of one's own representations. Neurotic behavior is thus tied to representation.

THE HEYDAY of music publishing in Minnesota, the period from 1900 to 1929, saw almost 500 known individual pieces come out for the piano-playing and singing public. More or less in line with what was happening in the rest of the country, the real peak occurred from 1910 to

Against Sleep And Nightmare

1919. By the mid-1930s the decline in sheet music sales was becoming swift and inevitable, hastened by the increased popularity of the radio and the phonograph. As early as 1915 the Emporium Mercantile Company of St. Paul had added a "new phonograph department," and it was not long before the "crank box" and canned music replaced the piano as a household necessity and Americans

became listeners. In their turn the phonograph and radio became status symbols of the parlor. (<http://collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/44/v44i04p122-141.pdf>)

The phonograph transformed and reduced the previous collective musical culture.

But the process was not a straightward progression from the unmediated to the mediated. The same increasing means of production that produced the phonograph also produced instruments and sheet music, gave all classes more time to focus on music and allowed more musicians to make a living at music.

What is uniquely human in many ways is what brings a profound disquiet to our existence. Our ability to manipulate symbols and form language is what has expanded the human ability to loose balance between a symbolic relationship with the world and a direct experience of the world. It allows us to become unbalanced in the process of substituting the sign for the reality.

Writing about the collapse of the worker's movement in Germany,

Wilhelm Reich asked what the force which allowed humans to defend the society which repressed them and acted their interests. Reich's answer was the socially dominant forces of sexual repression. Towards the end of the upsurge of the 1960, the pamphlet "Reich, How To Use" by Jean J. Voyer appeared. Among other formulations, it said:

In all societies in which modern conditions of production prevail the impossibility of living takes individually the form of death, madness or character. With the intrepid Dr. Reich, and against his horrified recuperators and vilifiers, we postulate the pathological nature of all

character traits, i.e. of all chronicity in human behavior.

(<http://www.bopsecrets.org/PS/reich.htm>)

Here, I believe "Chronicity" means concern with the future and the past. Like the Buddhists, Voyer thus advocated a purified immediacy. This position itself seems fixated and narrow. It is not "Chronicity" as such that is the enemy. Rather, neurosis appears when a particular rule system appear takes a fixated form beyond the immediate environment which gave rise to it.

In questioning the Reichian position, we need to look at the historical process which has summoned both neuroses and our ideas about them into existence. The danger of swallowing Reich or any particular psychological approach *whole*

comes from the problematic quality of anything that might describe itself as a science of psychology, especially one coming out of the 19th century. The history of 19th century science beyond physics is the history of science as often primarily a source of authority with only slightest hint of self-questioning:

First, the fact that from the fifteenth century on, it was the rare doctor who acknowledged ignorance about the cause and treatment of the disease. The sickness could be fitted to so many theories of disease - imbalance in vital humors, bad air, acidification of the blood, bacterial infection - that despite the existence of an unambiguous cure, there was always a raft of alternative, ineffective treatments. At no point did physicians express doubt about their theories, however ineffective. (http://idlewords.com/2010/03/scott_and_scurvy.htm)

The concept of enlightenment is slippery enough that the Feudal system of Tibetan was quite able to use it as a justification for the brutal domination of monasteries and lay lords over the mass of peasants. Indeed, whether it is religious leader, scientist or revolutionary, the wielder of opaque specialized knowledge should be avoided.

The entirety of the article on scurvy is worth a read as an example of the limitations of the initial understanding that science had of scurvy. Without an understanding of the nature of scurvy as a deficiency of a substance, the initial discovery that lemon juice could prevent scurvy was eventually lost and was only rediscovered along with the actual cause.

Hopefully, the survey gives the reader an idea why an understanding of neuroses and the various means of escaping them are both important for radicals and a difficult and deceptive riddle.

My aim, then, is to survey the various methods, aiming to explore the particular



Against Sleep And Nightmare

worthwhile *structural elements*. This is an exploration rather than a pronouncement. It provides a variety of structures we revolutionaries can use if we keep in mind the tenuousness of our knowledge. The method of numbered theses is often used to connect otherwise disconnected thoughts. In this case, I am using it because the lines of thought go in a variety of different directions, so that, like the Seven Bridges of Königsberg, in order to visit all the crucial questions, some of questions must be revisited ...

I. Dreams... Our Dark Continent

A Star Trek: the Next Generation episode describes a dream world where those who have been assimilated by the totalitarian Borg can again experience their individuality. This fantasy describes something we all feel; the relief from relentless routine that comes from dreams and fantasies of a different life. In the episode, those in the dream world have no memory of the dream world once they awoke and began their routine, just as we often struggle to remember our dreams of a different life when we are enmeshed in routine.

Today, we live in a world that is utterly insane but which continuously thwarts our ability to articulate this insanity. It suppresses our memory of any alternatives; it suppresses any language to express an alternative; it speeds life to the point where we don't have time to understand the situation; it separates people to the point where they don't trust anyone to believe, or be sympathetic to, their plight.

Our repression comes as a result of the degradation of the totality. Any foundation that would be used to express an alternative is undermined by the commodification of dissent, by the constantly increasing pace of life, by the atomization of human relations and the destruction of rational thought. But by the same mechanism, formless resistance appears in places and will expand at the rate this society goes to crisis. The "Borg" today is not some external

invasion but rather a symmetry of spurious choices which permeates life. Dreams and the remembering of dreams today together feel like a crucial part of possible resistance. The remembrance of dreams is itself a practice of Tibetan Buddhism as well as a variety of Shamanic traditions throughout the world. And this awareness has come as modified versions of these practices have been spread throughout the developed world by New Age Entrepreneurs. The New Age Movement involved the



revival of a whole spectrum of alternative spiritual, psychological, body work and energy work disciplines – everything from hypnosis to Buddhism to yoga to qigong and beyond. Coming out of the explosions of social possibilities in the 1960s and salvaging a wide variety of methods from the past, this "movement" was crystallized by a wide variety of New Age entrepreneurs who have inevitably narrowed these experiences into a specialization on the edge of life. The rising period of capitalist society was characterized by ideologies of science. The present declining period of capitalist society is characterized by ideologies of religion. The rise of religion as an apparent replacement for politics or science can be traced to a capitalist society whose inhabitants no longer

expect progress. Seeking a higher purpose – in religious terms, "Spirituality" – remains a constant need within human society. And, as capitalist society tends towards a more hopeless and incomprehensible form and the mystique of science and progress are debunked, the mystique of a religious, personal vision gains authenticity. The same critique applies just as much to idealist philosophy. Religion contains a tone of despair and submission to the mystical, where philosophy contains an optimism for Reason's power. But with the universal degradation of thought, "reason" itself becomes just a reflexive faith in a kind of neurotic fixation. Science was not always "just another religion" but it now seems like that to a good portion of humanity. The advance of the overall means of production increases the *potential* exactness with which we can describe previous history. The degeneration of social relations under later capitalism decreases the actual or average level of this same understanding. This one instance of the contradictions between real and potential human possibilities under capitalism has profound implications for revolutionary strategy. Despite being presented as a historical moment, the recent failed climate summit in Copenhagen bears mention only at the level of being exactly what one would expect. The apparently opposing forces only squared off on the level of one scientific/bureaucratic/economic proclamation versus another. Every option offered not only promised to continue capitalist society but also to maintain 90% of the various forms of pollution that it produces. But just as much, each side offered a competing simplification of the present totality. I don't claim expertise to evaluate them, yet the faith the ideologically charged have in these predictions seem dubious. Moreover, whatever the validity of this particular effect of pollution, we know, overall, that human chemical pollution is creating massive catastrophes. The fight

Against Sleep And Nightmare

of the liberals is merely to create a variety of controls of certain ineffectiveness against only one kind of pollution while fighting ideological opponents around obscure points that we can't even be certain if this will matter. Here we have the challenge for present day radicals: The rise of capitalism has created many areas which science can predict and control very exactly. At the same time, it also has created complex configurations of objects whose behavior is more complex and unpredictable than ever before. how can one escape this wall of manipulative fog?

Historical insights come through placing existing processes within larger frameworks. Classical mechanics is now seen as a special case of quantum mechanics. Material production can be seen as a kind of information processing. And, a given viewpoint sometimes strains to escape from the dominant framework. Isaac Newton used classical geometry rather than calculus to formulate his theory of gravity in his *Principia*. This showed the correspondence of this formulation to classical concepts but hid from the world a new tool for directly understanding instantaneous motion.

To escape the dominant pseudo-issues of today, the communist perspective situates activity in collective processes. The spectacle, the present totalitarian monologue of the system concerning its fate, disembodied the perspective of the erstwhile spectator, filling his head with a perspective which is unable to return him to the position of seeing his physical and social existence.

The avant guard of the Situationists was

at least in the realm of the artistic. Today, we might wildly speculate that the avant guard of discontent is as much in the realm of the cybernetic world. In any case, we are communist anti-engineers here. We can trace a strange path, from psychology to revolutionary theory and sales training which has the virtue of stripping off morality and leaving you with analysis. We can roughly describe the modern neurotic conscious in terms of language structure. We'd suggest that this progression has involved both an expansion and degeneration. The advantage of all these cybernetic approaches over earlier approaches to the unconscious is that they offer a clean, model-based system for letting go of judgments. Their weakness is that they appear after the purpose for describing the relation between the conscious and unconscious has vanished from science's considerations. We say, of course, that this purpose cannot be what Freud imagined, the maintenance of civilization. Rather, this purpose needs to be the creation of a coherent human community; communism.

How does speculation on this level even help us move towards a communist world? In some ways, it just ends up talking about what isn't possible, but at other levels it provides ways to step aside and catalyze the possibilities offered by internal processes.

II. Unconscious

Freud described the similarity of the neurotic individual's rituals to the rituals of civilized religion. A neurotic harnesses ritual to calm the clash of violently conflicting internal rules in the same fashion as religion placates the contradictory demands of the deities. Ritual may serve to an extent to mitigate an

imbalance in rules previously laid down in a violent fashion, rules which the ritualist cannot bring directly into harmony. In many ways, today's society

of non-communication is formed out of the neurotic rituals of those who are unable to form direct bonds with each other.

Freud was not the first psychologist to speak of the unconscious. Indeed, in many ways, he was the last broadly recognized psychologist to aim for a psychology of the whole person. What he accomplished was to spread the awareness that the conscious mind occupies a paradoxical position in human existence.

The Oedipal Myth and related narratives provided the awareness that civilization suppressed passions because those passions presented dangers needing management and suppression. The moment of Freud's "discovery" shaded into the extensions of Reich, of the Surrealists and the Situationists – as well as of Mussolini and the fascists. Freud's theories themselves are both debatable and the tip of the unconscious iceberg. Buddhism was created as a system to not just placate the conflicting demands of a rule-based system, but to dissolve them entirely. Thus the wider-range of known mind-body techniques, from meditation to hypnosis to self-analysis and bodywork, offer radicals (and non-radicals) the possibility of going beyond neurotic compensation. Still, what's interesting is how, regardless of their degree of understanding, these many methods relate to the unconscious.

III. Language And Feedback

1) Feedback loops are the key components of post-World War II systems theory. Norbert Wiener described the generic feedback loop in his book *Cybernetics*. The feedback loop model unifies a wide variety of phenomena in natural and human activity. The smallest animals or bacteria use feedback loops and much of the behavior of even the most complex animals can be defined through such loops. A female leopard chasing a gazelle is in the moment of the chase because



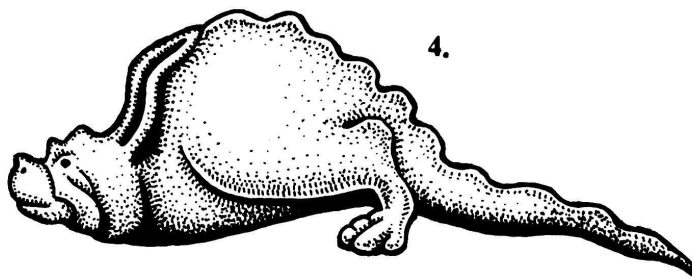
she alters her movements exactly as the Gazelle alters his. Indeed, much animal behavior which human beings are unable to duplicate still is rather clearly the result of highly complex feedback systems.

2) When feedback loops combine, they form integrated systems. The feedback based quality of many human and animal behaviors can be seen in the way in which they fail. A person with Parkinson's disease moves in a way that is characteristic of a feedback system overcompensating for movement. An old "ball dog", who has been conditioned to retrieve a ball, will often "short circuit" their loop by grabbing and "retrieving" the ball it offers you before you can even pick it up.

3) Coming before the digital computer, the cybernetic formulation provided a picture of intentional activity not specific to the processing of symbolic information. The feedback loop has a simple formulation: TOTE: Test Operate, Test Exit. Move toward the goal, testing if one is close enough. If you get close enough, stop.

4) Capitalism is an abstract system and a historical system. The relationship of wage labor allows a particular system of surplus extraction to be reproduced in the San Francisco, São Paulo and Tokyo. With this abstraction of everything, human self-consciousness along with all science has moved towards an abstract "structural" formulation that strips off the historical basis of understanding while allowing these abstract formulations to be applied over a wider area (this general tendency towards structural theory should not to be confused with the specific intellectual current of structuralism). This process of abstraction has built a world-wide machine that both manipulates human action and anticipates it. The

communist counter-strategy here is not to deny this direction toward structural analysis but rather to see the structural within the historical context and to place previous historical theories within a structural context. With this conception, we would trace the thread of a radical psychology and radical cybernetics



from Joseph Gabel to the Situationists and from Alfred Korzybsky, Noam Chomsky and Norbert Winer to Richard Bandler and Neuro-linguistic programming. 5) The biological *Signaling Theory* of John Maynard Smith gives a systems-based explanation for the origins of language. In this explanation, while an utterance may be honest as a signal, it need not have any logical truth or coherence. Rather, the honest signal is a precursor to language. Long after the death of those larger positions that benefit from these insights, the evolution of modern social signaling theory and evolutionary game theory have provided a basis for understanding unconscious processes in a manner that does not assume a fixed meaning to particular representations. Revolutionary theory requires an attitude. It can articulate the categories and ontologies of capitalism and communism and refuse to consider how one becomes the other. Or it can assume a process

which underlies both capitalist society and which will underlie communist society. I would argue that the latter approach is similar to both modern system theory as well as the original dialectics of Marx. The concept of the replicator encompasses any conserved information interacting strategically.

The simple process is that in given interactions, there is incentive for honest signaling and similarly other situations engender dishonest

efforts – though they are not so much dishonest as detached from their logical sense. And indeed, the simple model of modern expression shows that all those representations that detach from their particular logical sense go on to attach to a single central power – the spectacle. The flexibility of language involves at the least the ability to create new behaviors and, specifically, new feedback loops. The first verified examples of human language are from ten thousand years ago; we have no definite record of human language production before civilization. It is possible that, as Julian Jaynes hypothesized, language began with civilization. It is possible that pre-civilized human communication had the ungrammatical form of the modern Piraha. It is possible the language existed for quite a while before human civilization but simply was never recorded and somehow had its disruptive tendencies mitigated by the primitive community. Regardless, language, as it has evolved in human civilization, is as

Against Sleep And Nightmare

much part of an accumulated surplus as architecture or mathematics.

IV. Language In General

Language allows human beings to quickly change the feedback loops which govern their behavior. When individual changes in behavior can be transmitted more quickly than through genes or imitation, human society becomes self-modifying and capable of social thought and memory. Human beings distinguish themselves from animals at the point when they create their means of production. But they distinguished themselves as humans through language, the means of production par excellence. Symbolic expression with temporal and recursive binding – modern language – is a prerequisite and product of “civilization”.

It reflects human beings’ creation of their means of production and is one part of these means of production.

Language did not appear suddenly with all its modern capacities for self-reflection and “individual choice”.

Archaic language appeared in what we now describe as religious expression.

Julian Jaynes postulates the archaic brain as divided into an order-giving right and an order-taking left. Much ancient literature seems to involve unexamined forces making unarguable demands on unreflective humans. The increasing flexibility of human means of production have characterized the evolving human relation to language.

We could say that the first stage of civilization involved the creation of a simple agricultural economy controlled by a simple command system. Language allowed for large-scale organization and slow modification of behavior. But

during this time, human language use was generally not self-reflective. This corresponds to both the schizophrenic state and the “bicameral mind” described by Julian Jaynes.

1) The development of agricultural civilization allowed the social accumulation of language ability.

This may have involved “The breakdown of the bicameral mind” or may have involved other processes which allow language to become more self-reflective.

a. Yet it was only in the twentieth century that Noam Chomsky characterized human language as a grammatical system which allows the ordered parsing and manipulation of an infinity of signs. Human beings are unique among animals in their ability to use language to control, direct and change their behavior, even if they not unique in

using symbolic expression.

b. All civilizations have involved efforts to control and codify language. This discipline implies a strict grammar which requires that, among its complex rules, fixed nouns perform fixed verb actions which are described by a set series of adjectives. Such grammatical discipline fights a constant struggle against the use of language as a spontaneous and immediate extension of feedback loop activity. The alleged properties of the language of the Piraha represents the far counter-pole to such linguistic discipline – though we are currently ignorant of whether such functional sound poetry represents original language or a reaction to the language of civilization.

c. To say “rational human being” is to express in language that a

person uses “reason” – language – correctly. This requires language to describe itself. Such self-description requires grammatical constructs for self-description.

Thus such a concept and such constructs came at the time of the ancient Greeks - the dawn of the era of language describing itself.

We can see the last two thousand years of extreme upheaval as the process of language becoming self-reflective as production relations become more self-modifying. This answers numerous riddles posed by linguists and philosophers. I am combining language and logic in my discussion. If we define logic as a set of rules for what makes a statement convincing, we can assume that any language has a logic and that “logic” is a part of language.

Among other properties, the era of capitalist society is the era of production becoming self-altering. The means of production must be constantly revolutionized rather than being fixed by the conditions of social relations. In describing that rationality had no other purpose than to understand the whole of its processes, Marx also described how reason rested on the entire production system.

2) “The discovery of the unconscious” in 1920 has become its undiscovery in 2009. We can trace the declining lines of science in a movement towards more compartmentalized approaches with the simultaneous rising lines of the power of science's analytic tools. Together, they first appeared as a distinct phenomenon and then eventually became only a curiosity. If we boil down Noam Chomsky's linguistics to a recursive, rule-based manipulation of symbols, the conscious mind might be seen as the



Against Sleep And Nightmare

part of the brain which maintains a plausible narrative of rule-based behavior. Thus neurotics have lost the balance between their internal narrative and the direct, sensuous experience of the world.

The contradictions of modern ideology are also well reflected in the simplistic tactics suited for Internet forums. The law of the excluded middle – either X is true or X is false – is patently inapplicable for the complex swirl of multiple causation around “issues” like “Climate Change”, “Health Care Reform” and “Financial Crisis”. This produces many statements which contain germs of both truth and falsehood.



V. Religion

We see various revolutionary writers, – notably Giles Dauve and Ken Knabb, put forward critiques of religion of one form or another. But these critiques seem ungrounded in the larger world of the conscious and the unconscious, the mystical and the neurotic, within which “the religious” lives.

Revolutionary materialists naturally see human beings as economic, social, psychological and biological beings. The present economic crisis is also an ecological, a biological and psychological crisis.

The present crisis situation brings to a head these various contradictions. Some have existed for hundreds of years and others for thousands of years. This crisis invites us to consider our fundamental conditions of existence as never before. At the same time, the present world produces a situation where many people simply do not consider their collective situation in any meaningful way.

In many ways, these critiques have not caught up to the critique of religion

which Tantra launched more than a thousand years ago, from within religion itself. Bagwan Shree Rajneesh, Osho, describes religion as preaching. For him, religion is the rule-giving side of “spirituality”.

In all specifically religious development, we can see tension between authoritarian control (often in a father figure) and nurturing community combined with a fluid organization of spirit (sometimes in the form of a mother figure). Different religions, of course, differ in the degree to which the authoritarian father has predominated over the nurturing mother.

Some forms, especially the patriarchal Abrahamic religions, have been a direct negation of an earlier holistic vision. The need to vanquish “demons” is the need to directly crush earlier forms of existence.

Hinduism involved a truce between these differing tendencies. Islam and Christianity demanded absolute domination by the father, but, in the form of Catholicism and Sufism at

least, there was some fall-back into a more peaceful coexistence of the two principles. Other forms, such as Tibetan Buddhism or Taoism, have involved an evolution of earlier holistic visions but still with ultimate justification of class society.

The question of God and the gods itself is virtually irrelevant to the deeper questions of religion. One God may be closer to no God in the sense of simply seeing all life being sacred. Many gods may be closer to no-God in the sense of avoiding a moralism that kills God to maintain His moral edicts with greater neurotic fervor.

It is plausible that, in a Nietzschean fashion, civilized societies cultivate on some level the neurotic compulsion towards rules that permitted those on the bottom to be manipulated while keeping some magical and Shamanic techniques preserved for those on the top. It is notable that numerous Eastern civilizations, having a compact between

pre-civilized and civilized religions, also further cultivated techniques of enlightenment. As an achievement, enlightenment is as useful to a civilized ruler as it is to a pre-civilized hunter.

Everywhere, indeed, large vistas beyond what Capital integrates are visible if not tangible. Aside from Jaynes, Alfred Korzybsky, Wilhelm Reich, FM Alexander, Fredrick Nietzsche, Benoit Mandelbrot, and others bear looking into. Alan Cohen's *The Decadence Of The Shaman* is a serious study but like the present investigation, it may best serve to demonstrate some small piece of what's possible. However, such demonstrations can be extremely useful – the power of the imagination is a crucial factor.

Today, evolutionary game theory and signaling theory offer a plausible argument that animal signaling was the precursor to fully evolved human language. The thing to remember is that a simple signal is both a fetish and an honest expression. The lion's bellow of strength and Thomson's Gazelle's leap of vitality express their condition by being in their condition. We can deduce how the evolution of this direct expression into the ability to logically represent another thing has been a good portion of what Nietzsche intuited as the tortuous process of creating a human being.

Even more, while this rationality did not for a moment fail to serve capitalist interests, the progressive aspect of capitalist society has been specifically to generate a rational view of the conditions of human society. Oppositely, the Spectacle is the return of communication to the signal. It is words and images which attach to the roar of power, which in turn represents only itself.

While we can, in subjective terms, point to the idiotic and soul-destroying quality of the present era, we cannot objectively say that the present era has ceased to advance learning. Now, in the complex terrible progress made by our present society, there are multiple processes of rising and falling levels of understanding. In 1948, Wilhelm Reich was arguably the last psychologist to confront the total problem of human existence in capitalist society, despite psychology crafting a vast series of particular tools afterwards.

Against Sleep And Nightmare

The new age movement really does bring all the spiritual discoveries of past ages to the loving arms of all those professionals willing to charge modestly high fees – they lack only the ability to advance beyond any of the defeats whose moments they purchase. While economics as a specialized field originated as a defense against the subversive implications of political economy, it can still achieve particular interesting analyses (such as those of Hyman Minsky).

With all this, our travels through the present panorama of alienation need to become an adventure rather than a chore. As a tool, revolutionary theory must aim for a lucid awareness of the elemental struggle beneath capitalist society.

If I'm mixing wild-ass, exciting theories along with fairly definite positions, one reason is to simply avoid being swallowed by the relentlessly dull surface of daily life which we face.

VI. New Age

1. The New Age Industry is a remnant of those cultural innovations, concentrated in the 1960s, which sought freedom from Western Culture's specific strictures. The need to maintain a sustainable position within capitalist society by leading these tendencies to be more purely recuperative – it is a more fluid side of religion.

Like any capitalist project, the New Age Movement has made many improvements on the level of methodology (often neglecting the social essence that originally gave rise to these approaches).

Communists will wish to use this point rather than merely take it as a moral condemnation. The challenge for any cultural vanguard is to remain on the other side of the frontier of the tolerable as capitalism advances this frontier. We must play, imagine, dream and surrender in a more full fashion than capital is able to integrate. Thus, after discarding the

more mystified and authority-oriented aspects, the techniques unearthed by the New Age practitioners might offer would-be communists an interesting toolbox for dealing with the insanity of current culture.

Neurotic compulsions are the universal glue of capital today. Capitalist social relations came at the point of fusion of the previous civilized strands in Europe and the Mideast. The framework of wage labor allowed all previous neuroses and counter-techniques to compete in the framework of commodity relations.

2. Karma, the accumulation of cause and effect, can be reasonably compared to the accumulation of surplus labor. Just as the desires of the ego are always disappointed, the results of human activities always escape the intentions of the actors. Modern capitalism is both obsessed with death and obsessed with ignoring it. The capitalist system of value is nothing more than the projection of intentions beyond the present moment – it is the effort to take your life with you into death.

3. Techniques of enlightenment could crudely be described as the project of escaping habits, compulsions, routines and received ideas — essentially attachment to past and future. The rise of spectacular capitalism marked the point where the project of communism and the project of enlightenment become intertwined — each requires a bit of the other and it is thus that the supercession of this era is the means where by they can each be authentically realized. The attack by Reich (and some Situationists) on character armor can be seen as one natural aspect of this process. Like other techniques, it is not unambiguously rebellious unless it achieves

autonomy from capitalist processes and the rebellion is not revolutionary unless it acts systematically against capital.

The spectacle is routine, daily resignation, in an era where it has become capitalized. The struggle against fixed ideas can no longer accept the division between daily life and the social totality. Karma and value form a unified phalanx. The evolution of capitalism itself has demanded more and more flexibility in certain domains and from a certain subset of the technical and working classes. From this, the techniques of enlightenment are clearly useful and capitalist society has imported yoga, Buddhism, qigong and other Eastern belief systems.

4. There are periods within capital's evolution where it forces the working class, kicking and screaming, into a greater level of flexibility than it was previously comfortable with. Here, resisting flexibility can be part of rebellion. There are other periods where the working class achieves more flexibility than capital can digest. Here, becoming more flexible can be a rebellious strategy.

VII. Techniques

There are a plethora of techniques of enlightenment. They roughly involve: going beyond the conscious mind's ability to encompass a phenomena; extreme concentration or extreme diffusion of consciousness; using the conscious mind's ability to self-describe to overwhelm it; stalking the dividing point between conscious (rule-based) and unconscious (feedback based) processes.

We might say that a certain proportion of these techniques most fully suit the need of civilized exploitation – guru meditation, self-abnegation, etc. Other techniques specifically resist exploitation. Osho provides a catalogue of many techniques in *The Book Of Secrets*.

1. Revolutionary theory works to connect

Against Sleep And Nightmare

the objective aspect of modern alienation and the subjective aspect of modern alienation. The objective aspects of modern alienation can be seen in wage labor and in the entire domination of capital and commodity relations over our lives. The subjective aspects can be seen in the domination of ideology and neurosis. In structure, this approach is identical to every position that demands that the user experience immediacy. The only uniqueness of revolutionary communist materialism is that it sees this shift happening out of the material conditions of society as a whole – the transition of means of production. Any materialist analysis of language (a la primitivism), of the use of the mind-body (a la FM Alexander) or of the human use of the environment has to come to the same conclusion – that we are approaching a final crisis. The unique point of communist theory is that this is happening on the scale of human society and so humans can create the solution (whereas other analyses are left merely with the understanding that a shift is crucial, but without the slightest idea how this will be accomplished).

2. But in many ways, the challenge is how to deal with an external imbalance between those who have moved further toward internal balance and those who have not moved as far in this direction.

The trickster anti-guru is a paradigm for both this bridge as well as a way this bridge can fail. The trickster anti-guru essentially serves as a catalyst, creating an unpredictable environment that allows the practitioner to become lucid in their habits. Zen Buddhism, Osho, and Carlos Castaneda exemplify this model. The actions of the anti-guru are calculated to force the practitioner to fall back on their resources and attain enlightenment without dependency on a guru.

The Situationist International also operated as a trickster anti-guru, forcing would-be followers to engage in their own searches rather than swallowing the ideas of the Situationists.

The trickster anti-guru always walks a knife's edge. Even when they successfully inspire a practitioner to act for themselves, they can allow the person to attach some residual belief in the anti-guru's ability to inspire further such

revelations, ultimately impelling the anti-guru to become a guru. The best anti-guru warns against this danger, despite the fact that most also fall at least partly into this trap. The Situationist International originally described the framework that it is necessary to take up here: being in a race with the forces of conditions, and attempting to use conditioning methods beyond what a conditioned society could tolerate. Yet towards the end of the SI's history, Debord admitted that many members failed to do more than passively admire the organization.

The ambiguous communist potential within New Age schemes can still be seen in their emphasis on being fluid. Capitalism requires that the working class become more fluid in their adapting to its conditions but the capitalist enterprise itself is never a fluid or flexible entity. Essentially, it involves rigid controls combined with clever inveigling.

3. The New Age paradigm of a person being in the flow, taking responsibility for their own health, their own life and existing ecstatically in the now, can be at best manifested in a few incidental persons. The relationship of teacher and student, shyster and consumer, is based not on the uniqueness of the person but the spectacular distance that permeates all capitalist relations.

The revolutionary group which cultivates methods of being in the flow risks the same problem of followership as the New Age guru. The only advantage a revolutionary group might have is the lack of any need for followership. Those groups which maintain a self-limiting quality may have the opportunity to make their existence a provocation.

The Further Adventures Of Crisis Capitalism...

(snapshots of the present and coming crisis)

“You observe this convenient bridge over the slough of crisis. We obtained a sufficient foundation for it by throwing into the slough old editions of economics texts, volumes of French post modernism, World Bank development reports and the University of Chicago's Complete Works Of Milton Friedman; blogs, articles, and videos of modern pundits; extracts from Walras, Ayn Rand, and various Buddhist gurus together with a few ingenious commentaries upon texts of Marx – all of which by some scientific process, have been converted into a mass like granite. The whole bog might be filled up with similar matter.

“It really seemed to me, however, that the bridge vibrated and heaved up and down in a very formidable manner; and, in spite of Mr. Smooth-It-Away's testimony to the solidity of its foundation, I should be loath to cross it in a crowded omnibus, especially if each passenger were encumbered with as heavy luggage as that gentleman and myself....” (text after Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Celestial Railroad*)

Present day social relations are roiling, shaking and howling. The notable achievement of humanity in these conditions so far has been our ability to still feel that life remains normal. When the trajectory of this careening vehicle takes a steep dive, there is panic, but once things return to a semblance of normalcy, we can with relief forget our worries.

The last issue of this occasionally published magazine was five years ago. “*The Return Of The Crisis*” was the main article. Since that time, the crisis

seems to have grown in the direction we sketched. “*The Return Of The Crisis*” analyzed the instability of modern capitalism in terms of ideological distortion, declining rate of profit, Ponzi finance and untouchable rackets (“leviathan industries”). All of these things have come into play much more actively than in the unsettled conditions after September 11th.

Now that the bubble has been discredited, at least for a little while,



Executives clean out their offices at failed Leman Brothers

mainstream journalists have provided us with many concrete details about the crisis-producing dynamics whose logic I previously sketched in rather general terms.

I am satisfied with “*The Return*” as a rough statement of the crisis dynamics which this society seems to have entered. In this further report, I aim to highlight, and somewhat update its points, certainly gloating just a bit about how the mainstream first refused to acknowledge the slightest problem but now writes pieces that are both intentionally and unintentionally instructive.

From mortgage bonds to CDO's to CDS to what-all, the *credit derivatives* of early 2000's Wall Street have the quality of American cars from the 1970s. Powerful but poorly constructed engines are

married to over-built chassis adding up to one unsafe ride.

The entire circus of credit derivatives involved and still involves complex agreements between large corporations, governments and other investors. Since the agreements can be more or less anything (“pay me one millions dollars if the price of oil goes up or if it rain in China...”), we can't a technical summary of all their implications (and generally, neither can even the people investing in

them). What should be clear is that they involves a decision on the part of the ruling class to move the very process of resource allocation into an image cloud. The survey below is thus intended to give the flavor of the circus rather than a complete analysis (also consult last issue's “*The Return Of The Crisis*”)....

For five years, [David X] Li's formula, known as a Gaussian copula function, looked like an unambiguously positive breakthrough, a piece of financial technology that

allowed hugely complex risks to be modeled with more ease and accuracy than ever before. With his brilliant spark of mathematical legerdemain, Li made it possible for traders to sell vast quantities of new securities, expanding financial markets to unimaginable levels.

Wired Magazine
(http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/17-03/wp_quant)

Wired Magazine naturally mentions that many authorities warned that the formula could not be safely applied to investments. However, the need of Wall Street to market derivative products took precedence over these arguments. The individual water molecules in a glass of water move in a random but

Against Sleep And Nightmare

uncorrelated fashion. Each molecule's chance of moting is unrelated to that of the others'. The sum of this uncorrelated randomness is the fairly predictable behavior of liquid water. Over the last 20 years, Wall Street produced a complex arrangement of investments resting on the fiction that markets could be reduced to the kind of randomness that exists in a glass of water.

David Li's Gaussian copula function gained further ideological force through a floridly false but appealing assumption: it assumed that the correlation between different default rates could be more or less exactly calculated by looking at the past correlation of their prices. This dovetailed with the neoliberal ideology of efficient markets which dominated the entire capitalist class and so it was a perfect accelerator for the process of selling immensely profitable garbage.

What is amazing is the degree to which Bernanke has been unable to process what has happened over the last year and a half. It isn't simply that he is trying to restore the status quo ante; he seems to see the only possible operative paradigm as the status quo ante. Worse, he has a romanticized view of it too. Yves Smith "When Does Faith in Financial Engineering Wane?"

Listening to two interviews with former World Bank Chief Economist Kenneth Rogoff, (at <http://www.onpointradio.org/shows/2007/11/wheres-the-economy-headed> and <http://www.businessinsider.com/henry-blodget-rogoff-the-worst-is-over-are-you-kidding-2009-3>) one can find a fascinating study in contrasts. In the second interview, this alleged expert in finance not only expresses pessimism concerning any solution to the crisis but also expresses anger at those who led the US to engage in dubious financial engineering for an extended period of time. In the first, earlier interview, he himself relentlessly pushes the view that the US is absolutely and fundamentally healthy and the strategy of financial speculation is a natural part of economic development. While Rogoff, in the first interview, calls the American Economy fundamentally healthy, in the second

interview he says "The big problem that they can't figure out how to solve is that while we were sleeping, they let this banking [system] grow and grow and grow and they provided these guarantees and said not to worry..." and describes himself as angry.

There were always two problems with CDO's. First, there was no obvious way for credit derivatives to settle; the process of bankruptcy was sufficiently fuzzy and differed sufficiently from case to case that there was no watertight way of calculating when credit derivative buyers should be paid and how much. Second, the credit exposure taken on through trading credit derivatives was huge; the cash flows were hugely asymmetrical, with a certainty of modest annual payments going in one direction and a low probability of a massive cash settlement in the other. In that sense, they were like life insurance policies, but life insurance policies where the sum assured was not hundreds of thousands or a few million, but hundreds of millions or even billions. Those problems were never solved. Instead, from the middle 1990s, a market grown crazy through never-ending expansion and excessively cheap money simply started trading credit derivatives without solving the problems underlying them. Martin Hutchinsen Of Prudentbear.com (http://prudentbear.com/index.php/commentary/bearsclair?art_id=1019)

And the inferiority of the "products" has come home to roost for the investors:

But while investors tally the losses that were generated by loose lending so far, the impact of another lax practice is only beginning to be seen. That is the big banks' minimalist approach to meeting legal requirements — bookkeeping matters, really — when pooling thousands of loans into securitization trusts. Gretchen Morgenson (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/01/business/01gret.html?ref=business>)

All of this has created a situation of both

immense loss to investors and immense uncertainty as to where these immense losses reside. This creates an unwillingness of investors to invest in any financial instrument – until the Fed offers blanket guarantees for such investments. Of course, when the Fed offers this "backstop," it means investors can stop caring about fraud or the productivity of their loans at all. The Fed has attempted to address this problem but herding investors towards "productive" investment is akin to herding cats.

As Warren Buffet writes about one of his stable of companies:

Clayton's lending operations, though not damaged by the performance of its borrowers, is nevertheless threatened by an element of the credit crisis. Funders that have access to any sort of government guarantee — banks with FDIC-insured deposits, large entities with commercial paper backed by the Federal Reserve, and others who are using imaginative methods (or lobbying skills) to come under the government's umbrella — have money costs that are minimal. Conversely, highly-rated companies, such as Berkshire, are experiencing borrowing costs that, in relation to treasury rates, are at record levels. Moreover, funds are abundant for the government-guaranteed borrower, but often scarce for others no matter how creditworthy they are. Warren Buffet <http://www.businessinsider.com/warren-buffett-explains-how-the-bailout-is-crushing-healthy-companies-2009-3>

Thus giving credit to private investors by no means guarantees that these private investors will use it to "help the economy" since these same investors still fear the manifold uncertainty of the credit mess and thus gravitate away from those companies not guaranteed by the state. Even among the ostensibly radical, there is an unfortunate tendency to accept the point of view of standard economics, beginning with the idea that to understand a situation, a pundit must be able to offer policy makers a way out of the situation.

Against Sleep And Nightmare

Revolutionaries have to take the opposite position. We just aren't offering any rational step forward for the capitalist class and given the present mess, it is hard to see any such rational steps for the economy. Certainly, it seems more likely that things will follow the trajectory they followed most noticeably over the last ten years; simulating recovery through more and more irrational (meaning unsustainable) steps.

Debates within the anti-state communism milieu can be equally instructive:

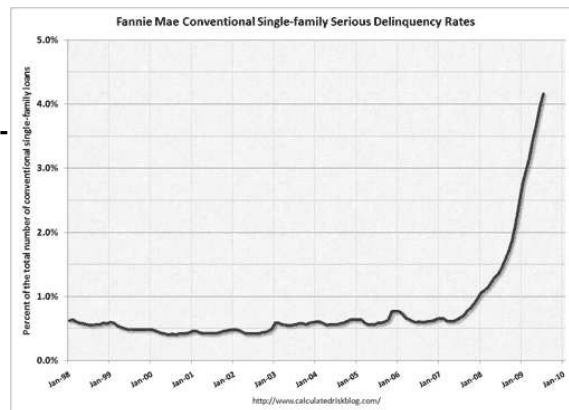
“It’s a huge oversimplification to say that the policy that got them into this mess was the massive resort to credit. What got them into this mess was subprime lending on the basis of a housing bubble and the repackaging and spreading out of collateralized debt obligations and mortgage-backed securities. Credit as such was not the problem.

“The Federal Reserve is hoping that this is a crisis of liquidity and not a crisis of solvency. If it is the former, it is likely that the federal government will be largely paid back, or perhaps even turn a profit. (Most analysts that I’ve read think that this is the case with AIG.) If it is the latter, then the crisis will still be averted but the state will take on a massive amount of debt. It is impossible to know which it is at the moment, since we don’t know what’s on the books of these enterprises. (Even they largely don’t know.)”

Poster “Mikus” on the libcom BBS (<http://libcom.org/forums/news/economic-crisis-18122007?page=12>)

“The Federal Debt is still less than 40% of US GDP, which is comparatively low both by international and historical standards ... In short, then, although the rate of increase of indebtedness in the US economy over the past four years is no doubt of some concern, the American economy is still financially sound”. *Aufheben Magazine*, issue #14, p 11, dated 2006.

Aufheben is in many ways the most respected English language magazine in the “Anti-State Communist” milieu. They produce long, well researched articles which tend to take a sensible middle ground position within the debates of non-Leninist Marxists. One would tend to blame their obliviousness to the gathering financial storm on the urge to deal with questions in a measured, reasonable way. Such urges miss the fundamental nature of what is now labeled the economy. On the historical scale, we are in the middle of a wild transformation of human activity on the social, economic and biological levels. *Aufheben*’s faulty judgment was based



on using both the criteria and the measurements of mainstream economics. The reality is that the US GDP’s apparent growth and the major corporations’ apparent profits came from the growth of financial assets while these financial assets grew under the radar via the derivative-based Wall Street financing system.

Certainly, as children of capitalism, for all of us it is easy to take the ready-made categories of this social system as given. Yet the key to understanding this society’s transformation is to see the opposite: how capitalist society corrodes the very basis of its own categories. Brick by sensible brick, *Aufheben* built a wall against any position which places the subjective first and instead simply recommends a nod to the subjective before going back to politics, which make it the caboose of the left. I have had friendly relations with the *Aufheben* people and this statement isn’t intend to vilify them. We are in a quandary – the critical position of Theorie Communiste

or the Situationists demands an overthrow of ordinary social relations, something that we indeed generally fall short of. But a contemplative position simply gradually loses touch with the critical transformation of reality. Certainly, I don’t mention *Aufheben* out of dislike or even simply because they are well known. I mention them for their very sensibleness and intelligence. And the point is that the present world has exceeded the bounds of the sensible. Structurally, the crisis stems from dynamics that have been quantitatively described by quite a number of commentators in varying levels of depth. However, to understand its apparently immediate onset, one needs to also understand the spectacular distortion field which gives capitalist society its apparent normalcy. Those who are sensible defer to the experts of one or another fields of study. My friends (not said sarcastically, I met the collective a few years ago) at *Aufheben* are competent to understand that capital contains a structural crisis but defer to the US statistics bureau for figures concerning current conditions. The problem is that the lies of the US state are part and parcel of the crisis of capital and one can hardly believe one but not the other. The entirety of beliefs outside the spectacle, “outside the mainstream,” are generally taken under the terms of “conspiracy theory” and rejected out of hand. Of course, to reject the standard line is not to embrace any particular other line. “*The Return Of The Crisis*” detailed the unity of spectacular dynamics and crisis dynamics. All of these notes only expand the process.

Cycles In Cycles

Start with any given current. To even remotely understand the financial market conditions that determine its context - the conditions of today’s economy - you need to correct for the distortions which twenty years of speculative finance have overlaid on what was previously a more standard system. Yet even this correction itself is trivial compared to the many distorting lenses which previous modernizations, adulterations, collective defeats, reactionary reforms and so-forth

Against Sleep And Nightmare

have imposed on what we modern proletarians might call our lives. It is natural for the human mind to extrapolate a given trend linearly. Yet to begin to have a handle on the conditions of today, we must consider a multidimensional space in curved, non-Euclidean geometry. Let us pretend, if only for a moment, that we are unbiased observers, unconvinced either way of the need for class struggle, for the overthrow of capitalism or for any particular political action. What are the key facts which we might first look to for understanding humanity's current situation?

Well, one unifying characteristic of many present day life phenomena is exponential growth. This includes - at the minimum - production, population, information processing, the size and cost of disasters, and the levels of pollution. From whatever viewpoint one might view these things, one can expect that they will not continue. The exponential growth of Bernard Madoff's funds offers a clear if simplistic picture of these limits.

All the different scales that we can view these growth processes on are significant. Human biological growth has been exponential for many years but this persistence has now brought it up to the level where it influences and can obliterate all life on earth. Agriculture and industry have each taken off on this ride.

Today's crisis of capital is also a crisis of non-human life, a crisis of agriculture, a crisis of population, a crisis of energy, a crisis of society and so-forth. The human ability to substitute learned social behavior for innate biological behavior has been a driving force for the "domination of nature" even before the start of human civilization. This process switched into higher gear when humanity gained the ability to create its means of production. Capitalist society put things into the present overdrive as human labor power became a commodity available for any purpose conceived of by the expanding system.

This explosion of production and exploitation has faced opposition at various levels over the years, notably for us, both self-conscious and spontaneous

workers movements of various sorts. Despite this, the level of opposition often seems to be at the level of the sleepwalker. Ostensible opposition today seems to lack the curiosity which Marx, the Surrealists, and the various new areas of scientific study have opened up. The present willy-nilly explosion is also a process of humanity drifting further and further from any unitary mediation of our total activity - the loss of community. Despite this, it seems likely that any escape from this situation involves this rapid transformation itself. Any liberation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself but in the context of its current conditions. Often, the question of a new world is put in terms of whether a universal community is possible given "human nature" or "normal desires" or similar such things. Such questions fail to take into account the continuous transformation of human nature by capital's accelerating transformation of this world. In this sense, any revolution will be an economic, a social, environmental and a biological revolution. Here, again, we understand why every aspect of life seems to be in crisis.

Despite, or even because of the likelihood that the processes of this dynamic will drive the most immediate change, I would like to paint a picture of the present whirlpool at the most abstract level....

Crisis Theory Reloaded:

The weakness of Marx's theory is naturally linked to the weakness of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of his time. The German working class failed to inaugurate a permanent revolution in 1848; the Paris Commune was defeated in isolation. As a result, revolutionary theory could not yet be fully realized. The fact that Marx was reduced to defending and refining it by cloistered scholarly work in the British Museum had a debilitating effect on the theory itself. His scientific conclusions about the future development of the working class, and the organizational practice apparently implied by those conclusions, became obstacles to

proletarian consciousness at a later stage. Guy Debord, *Society Of The Spectacle*, Thesis 85

The crisis is both part of the fabric of our daily lives and a particular series of mismatches which are rolling through the system. We have a herd of "elephants in capital's living room", of "leviathan industries", of contradictions which each infect daily life but, to an almost clichéd level, cannot be addressed. The difficulty of finding jobs and housing, the time wasted getting to work, the state of health insurance, etc., everywhere, the insanity is so great, it cannot be mentioned.

This is the texture of our world. This is the "foam" of crisis capitalism. Survival goes from dull routine to a complex strategy game but it never lets up. We are going from television (which once gave us propaganda saying we were lucky to live in America to the Internet) where we find hints about how to be lucky enough to live.

Certainly, the recent popping of the housing bubble was a larger landslide than average in the overall process of capital's mountain dissolving. Still, in this process, we can expect that over the next few years, capital will construct a series of more desperate economic Maginot Lines intended to keep the implication of the contradictions from appearing. Indeed, whatever is said, the unanimous feeling of our world is "let me escape first, before the ax falls".

If we now are articulating the quantitative details of capitalism's crises, it is ultimately as part of bringing this entire hidden realm back into the open - to give ourselves a way of understanding crisis capitalism's accelerating contradictions without falling into uncertainty or conspiracy theory. Capitalism is both a historical system and an abstract system. It is historical in the sense that it comes out of and transforms the wide web of social relations we human have built over the last ten thousand to hundred thousand years. It is abstract in the sense that it conjures up a market place outside of any historical context, a market place in which we human beings are impelled to act in a fashion akin to electrons in a magnetic field. Human labor power in particular is

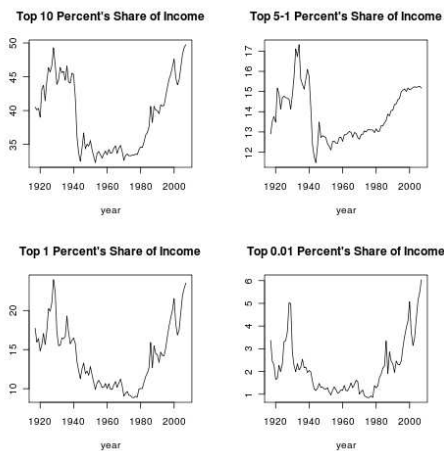
Against Sleep And Nightmare

taken as a fluid resource which can be mobilized for any purpose. The act of two people exchanging something can, in the abstract, have so many complications to it that its analysis becomes nearly impossible. One party has more power than the other or the parties may be more or less evenly matched. One or both parties may be desperate to make the exchange or it may be made at leisure. A factory owner can hire workers like an engine sucking in air, having perfect confidence that if one worker won't fit, another one will. The buyer and seller of an antique car might carefully bicker and haggle with neither guaranteed of making a move. A subsistence farmer might not work for a wage if it happens to be convenient for him. Capitalist society in particular is based on the assumptions of the factory owner. The capitalist purchases resources and sells them at a profit. This means that all the resources must be reasonably "liquid". They must flow at a predictable rate.

The present day form of capitalism has extended and tuned the feedback loop to an extreme degree. Producers, consumers, investors and speculators interact in the process of deciding consumption, production and investment on a global scale. Despite the continual tuning of experts, the system has lately shown millions of people its tendency to go off the rails.

Still, we foes of the current order are in a bit of a quandary. The time when skilled metal workers made a painstaking study of Karl Marx's *Capital* has passed – whatever its merits, the book *Capital* will never return to being "the workers' bible". Moreover, would-be revolutionaries' efforts to use crisis theory for revolution have had a poor track record in the last two hundred years. In the time of Germany's Second International, when the teachers of the Second International had supposedly prepared the working class for economic crisis, the working class failed to make revolution either with or without the impetus of crisis. But after Argentina experienced an economic collapse in 2001, the working class created a partial revolution despite the previous regimes having wiped out much of the memory of older radical culture.

What we must keep in mind is that despite seeming to "take its gloves off", this society remains the society of the spectacle with the atomization and loss of meaning and community which that entails. Spectacular domination is not really a matter of lies being believed. Rather, the spectacle is an inherent concept of the world which is accepted as natural only because there is no coherent alternative. And this lack of alternative is not really a lack of imagination on the part of the populace. Rather, the totality defines ideas more than ever before. Ideas define interests more than ever before.



The unconscious unwillingness to think and talk about the dominant dynamic as a mad machine going off the rails comes because such a view connects to a collective opposition which does not yet exist, for which there is not yet the immediate base. With all this, I aim for a "modest" further explanation of the crisis which connects objective and subjective conditions.

Certainly, when the Stock Market wipes out ten years of profits, Marxists prophesying "inevitable collapse" no longer seem as irrelevant. Still, if you hang out with the extreme left at all, you can get the impression that there is a *Capital* Reading Group in every town. What's remarkable is that all these efforts don't seem to bear any fruit in explanations of our presently churning economic system.

British industrial processes perfected the saber long after the use of sword fighting had past. Modern society has more poets than it has readers of poetry; at least

academic poets are likely to have some skill. The whole of modern society has a superabundance of resources while failing to create a worthwhile way of living. Karl Marx is read and interpreted in a sophisticated way by a quite small but energetic group and this group has found more interpretations and arguments than perhaps existed in the earlier historical Marxist movement. It is disheartening that so many of these efforts are games and hobbies, generally, but not always, in the pay of universities. A person's point of view helps determine their thinking and beliefs. The twentieth century ushered in fourth and fifth dimensional geometry in mathematics, yet it is a measure of the decay of this society that we seldom imagine the world beyond the usual three.

Alfred Korzybski's writings evoked fourth dimensional Minkowski Geometry in 1933. It is hard to imagine a writer demanding similar rigor from popular readers today. The transformation of coordinates, the revaluation of values and the choice of measurement are just a few conceptual practices which are now sadly confined to the world of engineering while ideology reduces the world's perspective to a flat ontology, flat consumerism and ideological manicheism.

Hopefully, this means that a revolutionary upsurge will be accompanied by a revival of a thousand investigations, some of which will lead in the direction of both revolution and a critical understanding of the capitalist system. Talking about economics is a rather strange activity. It involves describing complex processes which people think of as simple and familiar processes. I could launch into hundreds of different details and still not get to the heart of the matter. Certainly, anyone wishing exact definitions is welcome to read *Capital* and continue the discussion then.

The Kernel Of Crisis Theory:

Domination is at least lucid in that it expects that its free and unhindered management will very shortly lead to a quite large number of major catastrophes of the highest grandeur; and this as much as on ecological



terrains (chemical, for example) as on economic terrains (in banking, for example). **Debord, Comments on Society Of The Spectacle**

Recently, I was asked for a reference to understand “the very basics” of economics. This is a totally understandable yet impossible request. My friend wished to read Marx yet described himself as so ignorant he couldn’t follow Marx’s description of bonds. Yet a mainstream economics class also presumes such a large amount that one often doesn’t find the “simple answers to simple questions” even there. No theory of “economics” is objective or treats its subject thoroughly outside of the social context within which it begins. Essentially, a course in either basic or advanced mainstream economics is a course on how a particular version of a would-be human machine works. The fuzzy reasoning involved mixes together description of this hypothetical process with justifications for it.

In America, where every year mathematics is less popular, by relating economically, we residents have entered a financial roller coaster shaking and vibrating in multiple mathematical dimensions. So, I think that putting our understanding of capital’s instability into a rigorous but understandable mathematical model is one useful counter-project. It could allow discussions that don’t simply veer into references to Marx’s genius or arguments which are too obscure to be grasped by many people (whether they are literally

academic or not). It is not surprising that despite my efforts so far, I have not actually gotten much debate on this level. Still, what can revolutionaries do besides leave around what seems to them like kindling waiting for the day of conflagration?

And yet, “the economy”, the combination of production, trade and distribution that continually creates and recreates modern society, is not simply an idea or a spirit. When two or more people have an ongoing trading relationship, there are a variety of qualitative and quantitative relations that could be occurring. There are objective, technical qualities which cannot be understood in the same qualitative flash that let one instantly feel the basic insanity of the world of work or the shopping mall.

Still, I think that we can give an appropriate snapshot of capital’s quantitative tendency to crisis once one accepts the limits of our methods: I define only what is necessary, I assume the reader has basic understanding of the economy in which we all swim. I am not describing all the implications of the world of wages. I instead jump directly to the question of crisis in the present world we implicitly know. I am making a mathematical model.

I would invite the reader to approach the discussion as being similar a mystery novel. I will be using some letters to define some quantities and it will require a bit of thought to put these pieces together. The model is also a simplification but one intended to

illuminate the full complexity of life. I will make use of metaphor and intuition sketching the limits of this simplification. And Especially, I must count on the reader to creatively fill in the details. I will make reference to “the whole” of things – to the whole of human society, the whole of capitalist relations and to the whole of production. I will look at the process of measuring things, to the geometry which various measures create. We begin by considering the whole of society’s production. A capitalist society produces a huge array of things, more things each year than humanity produced in all of pre-capitalist history. Let us call this massive stash, “the pie”. There are two seemingly simple question that come up: “who gets what proportion of this pie?” and “how do we *measure* the proportions that different people get?” The usual answer to both questions is “the market decides this”. We will begin by assuming that this answer is not enough – not even that it is wrong but rather that it doesn’t really tell us what we want to know – “the market” is only defined in terms of itself so it reveals little. We will be dismissing the market for now and looking instead at more basic processes – the social relations and material forces.

So, one way to measure the distribution of commodities is to look at the labor that’s involved in creating them. For now we’ll use the labor power, the creative energy involved in a commodity, as a yardstick to measure the total production of a society. This is simple if abstract. What’s important to keep in mind is one could use other measures in looking the division of our pie.

Now, let us go into model making with some quotes,

The Wolf Report:

“For capital to become capital, for the bourgeoisie to become the bourgeoisie, the capacity for labor has to be detached from the means of labor, so that labor itself appears as a commodity with only one use, its usefulness in exchange for the medium by which labor can purchase its own subsistence.”

<http://thewolfatthedoor.blogspot.com/>

Against Sleep And Nightmare

Our friend Karl Marx:

“Total capital C consists of constant capital c and variable capital v, and produces a surplus-value s. The ratio of this surplus-value to the [advanced] variable capital, or s/v , is called the rate of surplus-value and designated s' . Therefore $s/v = s'$, and consequently $s = s'v$. If this surplus-value is related to the total capital instead of the variable capital, it is called profit, p, and the ratio of the surplus-value s to the total capital C, or s/C , is called the rate of profit, p' . Accordingly $p' = s/C = s/(c + v)$ ”

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch03.htm>.

Just to keep in mind the quantities that are being talked about in mind: C (capitalized) is the total investment of an enterprise. We're dividing this into v, variable capital, which is the amount spent on labor power and c, the “fixed capital”, is essentially everything else. The “surplus value” is s, the amount that the capitalist retains after selling his product and paying out his costs.

Assumption 1: We will begin by assuming that the price of goods – aside from the commodity of labor power – will be proportional to the amount of labor value which is required to produce them. Now, we look at the capitalists of this society. These characters buy goods and labor power in order to resell the resulting commodities at a higher price. A given capitalist buys c goods and v labor power and produces C result. The capitalist's total investment is $c+v$. As a capitalist, he must thus sell his production C at a price of which reproduces his initial investment plus a rate of profit, so:

$$p'(v + c) = C.$$

Assumption 2: We will also start out assuming that every worker gets a constant proportion, in labor value terms, of the goods he produces, once again measured in labor power. This is equal to the assumption that each gets a fixed portion of the results of their working day.

Assumption 3: As a capitalist enterprise develops, it tends to use more “fixed capital”: the amount of raw materials, overhead, fixed machinery etc, still

measured by labor power, that the enterprise uses increases in proportion to the amount of labor bought. Accepting this assumption, we can deduce that the rate of profit declines in the enterprise exactly as it uses more capital equipment per laborer. But it is important to not just understand the arithmetic but to see what's happening. Basically, measured in labor terms, capital is an ever growing complex which takes in approximately the same amount of stuff, labor and pays out the same amount of stuff, commodities measured as labor power. Of course, in this case, its profits decline as an ever larger capital complex rests on a much more slowly growing amount of variable capital – the growth of variable capital is simply the growth of the population.

We already have an equation for the rate of profit for our “given enterprise” - $p' = s/(c + v)$. As we assume the normal path of an enterprise is to increase the amount of c while leaving s and v fairly constant. So the top, s, of the right fraction stays constant while the bottom, $c+v$, increases over time. Since we have a constant value divided by an increasing quantity, we have a decreasing rate of profit. That is the simple kernel. An increasing mass of capital must divide a fairly constant mass of surplus value.

In *Capital* volume 3, chap 13, Marx describes this tendency and gives numerical examples, in a clear, if long-winded, form:

Assuming a given wage and working-day, a variable capital, for instance of £100, represents a certain number of employed labourers. It is the index of this number. Suppose £100 are the wages of 100 labourers for, say, one week. If these labourers perform equal amounts of necessary and surplus-labour, if they work daily as many hours for themselves, i.e., for the reproduction of their wage, as they do for the capitalist, i.e., for the production of surplus-value, then the value of their total product = £200, and the surplus-value they produce would amount to £100. The rate of surplus-value, s/v , would = 100%. But, as we have seen, this rate of surplus-value would nonetheless express itself in very

different rates of profit, depending on the different volumes of constant capital c and consequently of the total capital C, because the rate of profit = s/C . The rate of surplus-value is 100%:

If c = 50, and v = 100, then $p' = 100/150 = 66\%$;

c = 100, and v = 100, then $p' = 100/200 = 50\%$;

c = 200, and v = 100, then $p' = 100/300 = 33\%$;

c = 300, and v = 100, then $p' = 100/400 = 25\%$;

c = 400, and v = 100, then $p' = 100/500 = 20\%$.

This is how the same rate of surplus-value would express itself under the same degree of labour exploitation in a falling rate of profit, because the material growth of the constant capital implies also a growth — albeit not in the same proportion — in its value, and consequently in that of the total capital.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch13.htm>

Relaxing Our Assumption...

Now, the basic position is plain and simple – the rate of profit declines as the rate of capitalization increases. However, all the assumptions that we've made do not necessarily conform fully to the world we know. So what we want to do is relax our assumptions. To “relax” an assumption, one wants to show that without assuming a point, one still gets about the same result that one got when one assumed the point. Each of our assumptions is a tendency but not an absolute rule. We know these tendencies sometimes apply but we see they don't always apply. So the validity of our argument ultimately rests on showing why the situations where the tendencies apply are more important, decide more, than the situations where they don't apply.

(Note that we can most easily simplify our assumptions in an order different from that in which they have appeared). **How to “Relax” simplifying assumption 2.**

Our assumption has been that the “rate of

Against Sleep And Nightmare

exploitation” remains constant – that each worker receives a fixed proportion of the goods that they create, with the amount of the good measured in terms of the labor-power required to create the goods. This is as condition which capitalist economics attack in theory while true capitalists attack in practice. First, I will mention that our final result can remain true with a rate of exploitation that declines as long as that decline is gradual and the growth of fixed capital comparative steep.

We tend to describe a multidimensional reality with one dimensional language. Most models of the process of capitalist growth involve one or two commodities being produced while the reality is that hundreds of type of commodities are produced. Some of these commodities are needed for physical survival of workers while others are necessary for “social survival” - a good proportion of US workers must have a car today simply because that is the only way that they could get to work. As technology progresses, it makes itself necessary.

How to “Relax” Simplifying assumption 1:

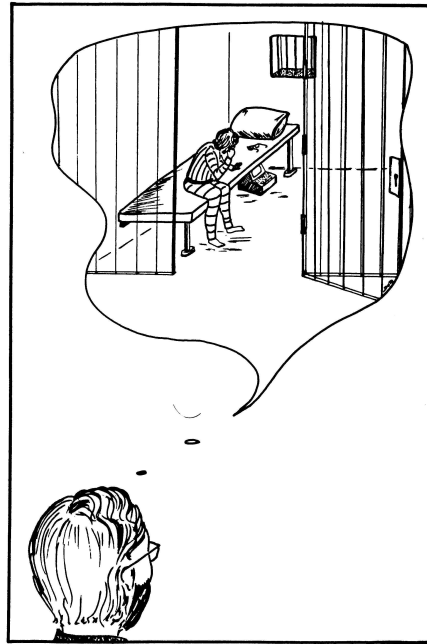
Once we see that there is a relative lower limit to the rate of exploitation, we can also see that actual prices of commodities are limited by the amount of labor power used to create them. Labor power is an ingredient of all commodities. Moreover, labor power is necessary for the reproduction of labor power, if the rate of exploitation is relatively limited, the reproduction of each person requires a certain amount of labor power rather than just a certain amount of any commodity. Here, the amount of labor in a commodity is a “floor” for the price of any given commodity.

It is not true, contrary to what Adam Smith asserted and Karl Marx assumed in Capital Volume I, that the prices of commodities average out to their value. As Marx shows in Capital III, the prices of commodities diverge from the simple amount of labor power within them depending on the capitalization of the enterprise involved. The history of economic theory has, in general, orbited around the question of investigating the nature of prices. Smith's original position, that the prices of commodities

were based on their labor content, became so glaringly dangerous when taken up by Marx that the field attempted to bury this research in the “more scientific” approach of basing prices only on each other.

How to “Relax” simplifying assumption 3:

Another way that the tendency to crisis has been challenged is through the argument that each capitalist enterprise



might use less, not more, capital. The thing to consider is that every industry in which more capital is used tends to become more centralized and more important for society. Oppositely, industries in which less capital is used become less important, fading to nearly nothing at times. Craigslist has around thirty employees and makes one hundred million dollars per year but this single website has mostly replaced the once multi-billion dollar classified advertising industry. The ultimate low capital industry is the homeless man who wanders the streets washing windows – he has no skills, no capital and makes no impact on capital's rate of profit. The ultimate high capitalization industry is the microchip industry, with vast factories serving the needs of continents. The steel mill still requires much more capital and so has a larger position in this scheme, if now lower than the chip maker. By this token, we will argue that

while some capital costs might go down and others go up, the net effect is that capitalization as a whole effectively increases and will continue to increase. We could also consult statistics concerning machinery per worker.

Recapping

The tale of capital's demise is a tale of ratios. Even if many “great economists” fail to get it, the tendency is clear with some crude simplifications. All the net products of this society are divided between our workers and capitalists. The challenge is determining how we should measure this total “pie” of products. To begin with, we will measure our pie using the amount of labor that goes into each product. With this measure, the percentage, the slice, of the net production pie that the working class doesn't get becomes Karl Marx's rate of exploitation (which also is the amount of time which a worker, on average, has to work for his boss' rather than his own benefit).

New commentaries touting “growth” seem to imply a general increase in society's production but the reality is that more of some items are produced than others. Even ordinary quantitative growth produces many disproportional relationships. The Capitalism of the present era piles these disproportional relationship up in a fashion which is difficult to grasp. This reality requires a dialectical perspective — the comprehension of the evolution of mutually contradictory tendencies — as a minimum condition for its full understanding even as it must suppress the dialectical fluidity of its citizens' thinking.

We have argued that the best picture of a growing capitalist society is one with a constant or slowly rising rate of exploitation (despite some arguments to the contrary). Capitalist society could be more and more productive, producing more with the same labor, and yet giving the working class the same goods or even fewer. This would result in a quickly expanding rate of exploitation. The problem with this is that some aspects of human survival require the labor of another human being.

While factories are more and more automated, medical care, farming or

Against Sleep And Nightmare

construction are much less so. This creates a ceiling keeping the rate of exploitation from rising beyond a certain level.

The capital of this society, taken together, represents its means of production. This is the structure by which our human society modifies its environment and satisfies needs and wants. There is “strong empirical evidence”, that these means of production, measured as labor or as physical goods or as money, tend to grow quickly to a high level.

Our assumption that the rate of exploitation is constant or grows fairly slowly means that the share of goods which capitalists gets remains fairly constant. As the total size of capital grows larger, a single share of capital gets less and less of this total social product expressed as labor. This leads to the infamous declining rate of profit. Another way to see this is to understand that the expansion of production is not even a process of keeping the slice of the pie the same. The increased production of capitalism imposes a terrain which defends capitalist relations and which destroys stable, collective activity. It is important to look at what goes into this situation. The working class could maintain a constant rate of exploitation through collective struggle. On one level, we can see the working class and the capitalist class playing tug-of-war over this level.

What’s more, even when collective resistance collapses, capital finds that the rate of exploitation still hits a ceiling because labor power require some, maybe small, portion of further labor power to survive and reproduce. This ceiling is a crucial factor in our reasoning. When there is a ceiling to the rate of exploitation, it means that, to capital, any money measurement of the social product is going to be approximately proportionate to the value measurement of social product – the labor going into goods will always be some fixed or slowly varying portion of the money cost of the goods. Oppositely, as production becomes more automated the size of the complex represented as the labor needed to reproduce it increases more quickly.

Now, we describe all this as fairly simple

but none of this is obvious unless you approach capitalism's operations in the way we have. Economics is a strange field - it is the “science” where the “scientist” is involved with “objectively” studying the field, advising the proper actions for management of the field and rhetorically justifying “the field” (the capitalist economy). The contradictions are rife, though this doesn’t mean it boils entirely to rhetoric.

Economists, in their function of justifying the economy, have moved away from the original theory that labor input played a crucial role in determining the price of goods. If we skip our assumption that the working class must receive a labor-valued percentage of the social product, then anything seems possible. The theory of Okishio, famous among those who would refute Marxian economics, states that when “real wages” are held constant, improvements in technology are bound to result in an increase in profits. Okishio is consistent with our proof of a declining rate of profit when the working class maintains a constant share of the social product, the social pie – Karl Marx’s rate of exploitation remaining constant (or only increasing relatively slowly). The apparent contradiction is resolved by seeing that a “constant real wage” implies a declining share of the social product.

When technology produces more stuff in general, wages that on average buy the same amount of stuff actually involve a decreasing share of total social product. This would seem like quibbling if the capitalist economy’s growth resulted in a uniform increase in all products, but this is not the case. Again, factories producing computer chips have become tremendously productive yet boots and houses are still produced with only small increase in productivity (increases which mainly come at the price of decreasing quality).

Capital today must continually fight to force its categories and its illusions onto our reality on a finer and finer level. This battle will continue indefinitely, regardless of the victories which capital may achieve at one point or another.

Thus, the theory of Okishio does more than improve the morale of stock market

investors – it provides a path to the US Department of Labor to formulate an index of inflation which will guarantee corporate profits.

Oppositely, when the working class fights for a share of society's total production, it both empowers itself and brings on the crisis of capital. Given the conditions of struggle today, we aren’t going to hold our breath about this — but, as we’ve noted, just the requirement to remain alive impels workers to gain some share of the society's total production and this pressure alone is enough to drive the crisis today. Naturally, capital resists the measuring of social goods in terms of labor exactly because this provides the basis for looking at the division of our finite social pie. Now, measurement by money has been the “natural” approach for hundreds of years. Still, in the 1970s and 80s, the US public became sufficiently aware that inflation eroded normal wages, and again ate away at the slice of the pie, that measures of inflation became a part of the measure of value and controlling measurements of inflation became crucial for capital.

So, when we talk of a dual nature of the equations of capital, we mean that these equations are subjective and objective. The Okishio theorem is both an attempt at an objective formulation and a call for capital to organize life in a certain fashion. A well run economy is both a program that is impossible to implement and a program for a final denial of humanity. As capitalism attempts to construct a world where our survival involves a vanishing amount of human activity, it produces a wide range of horrors, from lead-painted Chinese toys to shopping mall wastelands. These fail when human beings organize collectively to resist them and they also fail when human beings are just practically unable to live with them. The two kinds of failures overlap and may have somewhat different consequences but still lead in a similar direction.

If we want a simple image of the unfolding of crisis we could imagine two realities clashing – Okishio-world versus Marx-world. In Marx-World, human beings each consume some portion of their output and there is thus a somewhat

Against Sleep And Nightmare

limited pie divided between people. In Okishio-world, consumption is measured in an unexamined unit of money, with “stuff” valued arbitrarily against other “stuff”. In the Okishio world view, the amount of stuff you get is always increasing but Marx world view points out your ability to buy things measured in human labor is always falling.

The pathological American health care system embodies the contradictions of Okishio-world. Okishio-logic implies that Americans are receiving more and more of this fuzzy entity “health care” since they are paying more and more for their medical bills. Of course, this same Okishio-logic implies that this health care involves less and less human contact. But the only problem is, health care has not actually been able to fundamentally replace human contact. So the upshot is the supposed “health care consumer” winds up consuming a larger hunk of stuff with less value, some of it even deadly, but indescribably expensive. Here, the “hedonic” model of consumption is overlaid and imposed on the choiceless consumer – where the term hedonic means that the state assumes that you “hedonistically” enjoy anything the capitalists put in front of you. The state's and large capital's multitude of agencies must push the fiction that the price – Capital's price-with-profits-included – must be what the thing is worth.

Oppositely, the “Marx model” rears its head when the working class refuses to accept increased exploitation (in all the senses of the term). As I mentioned earlier, at the same time as the capitalist system evolves, the battle between the working class and the capitalist class is unequal and the capitalist class in general is able to increase the rate of exploitation. The system still runs up against the minimum labor-cost of physical survival given that humans still need other humans for this survival. So, Marx-world appears in a subterranean fashion, undermining our hedonic measures of value. Indeed, in all of our crises, environment, health care, capital faces that the ultimate costs of production are leaking out in one way or another.

From Declining Profits To Active Crisis

After jumping down the rabbit hole of analytical reasoning, we have come up with the declining rate of profit, the holy grail of the Marx-a-zoids. Still, if we just look at this as some discovery in arithmetic, then we would miss the qualitative discoveries that it offers. One might imagine a situation where the capitalists' profits decline leisurely as society's productivity advances.



However, we can discover the real meat of things if we look at the capitalists' many efforts to hold-back this decline and to even suppress awareness of it.

The state, the larger capitalist enterprises and the entire ideological complex can each work to impose short term solutions which certainly *seem* to solve the problem. Indeed, what matters to them is that the capitalist can succeed at doing this in the short-run. What declines under capitalism is the long-term, stable rate of profit.

All of this discussion is more than just an argument that profits will decline at some point. It is also a description of changes that have already occurred. It is not that corporate profits have vanished or even declined as such – rather, it is that the mass of the capitalists as a whole today

has grown to gargantuan proportions, with fat financial institution and shady speculative entities taking a piece of the pie along with the corporate interests. Yet, the cost of labor power is still a significant part of total costs, it still limits how this pie can be divided up.

Our, humanity's, activity over the last fifty highly productive years has involved creating a massive alien production/consumption machine. The spectacle's distortion field has kept the profitability of this machine hidden save

for a few moments of clarity as such late 2008. The monetary system, the credit system, the ideological system and the world management system must work ceaselessly to keep this realities from becoming visible again as it works in the US by piping money to the military, organizing “health care reform”, “cash for clunkers”, “the Wall Street Bailout” and Oh so many other efforts. In its entirety, capitalism can only maintain its profits through a series of speculative and artificial schemes while maintaining the social cost of survival at the highest possible level and the level of competition and uncertainty similarly.

Each apparent solution is at the heart of capital's next crisis. In only a year, the “subprime crisis” metastasized into a giant financial crisis and was met with an equally huge “bailout.”

But this bailout could only aim at restoring the previous insane “normal economic conditions.” More than in 1998 or 2001, the economy now presents itself as something like a circus from a 1930s musical; it's absurd and the measures to keep it going are ridiculous but everyone depends on it, so “the show must go on”. The most recently burst bubble perhaps relieves a little bit of the need to explain what Ponzi schemes are and why they are doomed to fail. The danger is perhaps the opposite; that the current problem will be seen only in terms of Ponzi schemes. So we need to connect the details of the previous argument to the visible insanity of today.

So, the pronouncement is ... when the rate of profit declines in an environment of leveraged, financial capitalism, such as today, it causes companies to become

Against Sleep And Nightmare

effectively bankrupt since they have borrowed money expecting to profit at one rate and now can only expect to receive a lower rate. However, because capital has many counter-measures to the declining rate of profit, the companies which are effectively bankrupt can continue to operate for a fairly long period of time. (For example, the US car makers were effectively bankrupt twenty years ago but have been kept alive through a variety of measures till now). The periodic crises happen when capital's counter-measures to the declining rate of profit fail. It should also be noted that all the countermeasures result in distortions to the equilibrium of distribution of goods between different industries that would otherwise exist. We can see this most clearly with the recent housing bubble, which resulted in a massive over-allocation of resources to housing.

These crises of profitability can be and are eventually solved without the profit rate going back up again. What happens instead is that debts get nullified, companies go out of business, the distribution of resources is adjusted and markets are restructured to allow accumulation at a lower rate of profit. We should keep in mind that capital can accumulate at any rate of profit. It is just the unexpected, unacknowledged declines in the rate of profit which create the problems.

This process of capital attempting to solve profitability crises is of course always evolving but it can not evolve towards greater stability. Capitalist economic theory, and capitalist ideology in general, does not trace the objective conditions of capitalist production but rather traces the ideal situation and leaves policy makers to attempt to impose those conditions. The stronger the spectacle – the stronger the control of the state/enterprise/media “complex” – the more the system can impose these capitalistically-desireable but fundamentally unstable conditions. As it has developed, the capitalist system has gained more influence over the context of investment buying decisions and all of the context outside of production itself. The American suburb was an entire urban form designed for

capital's needs, for example. This has allowed modern society to produce theories, advertising and whole industries which operate to ameliorate the declines in the rate of profit. More recently, we saw this in the dot-com and speculative implosions. The thing is that by being better at creating counter-measures, capital has actually created greater fragility coming from threat of those counter-measures failing.

Because for the last twenty years it has been so successful at postponing crisis, there are actually more extreme misallocations of resources than any earlier crisis – from housing, to unneeded SUVs, to unneeded hospitals, to defense and so on. The recent movements towards equilibrium have been as extreme as these misallocations. It is not surprising that Bernanke and Geithner and their Chinese and EU counterparts are desperately trying to avoid this return to equilibrium with new bubbles and speculation. Instead, further extreme interventions are clearly on the table. But if these interventions succeed in the context of not having first worked out the distortions in the system, they will set the seeds for further crisis in fairly short order.

Disproportionalities and the Social Meaning of Our Calculations

The progressive tendency of the general rate of profit to fall is, therefore, just an expression peculiar to the capitalist mode of production of the progressive development of the social productivity of labor. This does not mean to say that the rate of profit may not fall temporarily for other reasons. But proceeding from the nature of the capitalist mode of production, it is thereby proved logical necessity that in its development the general average rate of surplus-value must express itself in a falling general rate of profit. Karl Marx, *Capital*, V. III, Chapter 13

In our discussion, we show a decline in the rate of profit in terms of value and then in terms of simple prices. Now all of

our efforts here must ultimately aim at drawing a line starting at the subjective conditions of work and commodity relations and ending with the large disasters and irrationalities which we sad residents of present day capitalism face. So there are other observations we can find in the ratios that we've gone through. We can notice, for example, that profit declines because the mass of capital increases more quickly than the amount of product of society in terms of labor or “human survival”.

The declining rate of profit can be seen as one of many contradictions. In the unfolding crisis, capital strains against these contradictions in turn; limits imposed by oil production and environmental damage already played a part limiting China's growth at the height of the last boom,

The declining rate of profit is unique in that it is inherent to capitalist relations and disrupts them even when these relations might otherwise seem to triumph. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that the world the capitalism builds is hollow, with each victory making a collapse seem closer. Even more, the variety of other contradictions, from the health care crisis to “environmental degradation” to “spiritual impoverishment” altogether come from the disconnect between the means of production with the relations of production. The process of attaining profit is compressing the entirety of qualitative changes in this society into a massive quantitative structure. In this sense, all contradictions feed back into this one overall contradiction.

Indeed, the tendencies and counter-tendencies of capital's rate of profit carve out a portrait of the present world. The gigantically developed complex of industrial capital is measured in billions of dollars, with trillions of dollars of speculation on top of this. This entire complex, in the sense we've described, must impose both anti-human order and its own illusions on our world. Capital has now arisen as a mass looming over humanity. The materialized ideology of “hedonic costs” attempts to impose the idea that whatever industrial junk capital produces is desirable only because a price-tag has been added to it.

Against Sleep And Nightmare

The materialized ideology of “fair-value accounting” takes the ephemeral “judgments” of the market into the basis for valuing investments (a self-referential exercise to say the least). The materialized ideologies of physioeconomics similarly must propagate the illusion of the market existing outside of human relationships (and to be clear, none of these statements are claims to have “gone beyond Marx” but rather they are simply efforts to apply Marx's approach to the present era). Everywhere these exegeses of the market are extended by ideologies and even personal neurotic compulsions equating price, value and satisfaction. To reverse Chapter I of *Capital*, capitalist relations impose the illusion that since one exchange value is as good as another, so will be one use value over another. In reality, the process of the expansion of the means of production is a transformation of the whole of society. The creation of a factory transforms social relations in an entirely asymmetric manner, in everything from the generation of pollution to changes in the possible social values of labor both within and without said factory. And of course, we are dealing with the modern world where life is being transformed in more distinct fashions than any individual can keep track of and where the spectacular illusions of capitalism makes many efforts at an overview deceiving. Disproportionalities in the process of capitalist society growing can be seen both generating its quantitative and qualitative crises. A Ponzi scheme here is just the most extreme example of taking exchange value to be equivalent to use value. Capital treats people as a quantitative resource ready to exploit. We charted much of how this led Capital's own chaotic instability. But it is still worth highlighting the strong connections between the two aspects. On the one hand, we have those rackets which expect a constant level of profits – General Motors is the best example. On the other hand, we have entities which aim for a better share of profits by automating their operations and cutting into other companies profits. This leads to instability on the small scale. On the

large scale, the authorities have kept things together with various ad-hoc measures which are now breaking down. Everywhere, indeed, capitalist society simultaneously expects its citizens to fluidly adapt to the conditions of the era and to remain ignorant of more covert strategies for survival. Apple Computer profits from the prevalence of pirated music played on iPods while it simultaneously sells copy-protected DRM music. The arithmetic of consumption is based on the average person's calculated and verified laziness in understanding the operation of their world.

The expansion of crisis capital involves increasing disproportionality in wages and prices. iPods are one thing and gas prices are another. The difference between the highest and lowest within the working class and professional classes increase and this increase happens on a larger and larger scale relative to production. The consultant who can take a business “to the next level” is worth a percentage of the total business and said business has no choice in this matter since markets have the quality of elimination poker matches, destroying those who fail to reach whatever this next level might be. But simultaneously, those who perform ordinary labor naturally are expected to sink to nearly the level of slaves. Equally, average prices slowly increase while certain things get cheaper and others more expensive. Cash For Clunkers must naturally fail to put cash in anyone's pockets except the bankrupt car companies.

As we experience the various stages of growth, decline, explosion and collapse, we should notice that capitalists make decisions in terms of their immediate, private benefit rather than in terms of maintaining society or even maintaining capitalism within society. A crucial aspect of the ratios outlined earlier is that an individual capitalist does not see their condition as coming out of this relation. The apparently haphazard course of capital's current crisis responses also come out of this being a crisis of profitability and not a crisis of underconsumption. A crisis of profitability comes from a mismatch

between the arrangement of the firms in each market and the decreased organic composition of capital. "healthy" Profitability, even the lower natural rate, can only be created through the destruction of both some firms and some means of production. But "unhealthy" profitability can attained any number of ways, with those ways tending to lead even more “economic ill-health”. Simply "stoking demand" cannot solve such a crisis for capital. And the crisis-interventions we've seen by the US Fed, the US government are an example of the new model – profits will supported as directly as possible. It's characteristics:

- The state spends more while routing the proceeds to particular favored companies and industries rather than being generic "make work" projects. The states' money thus more and more supports profits rather than production, giving fewer and fewer "real" economic benefits.
- The state tweaks their project avoid any direct give-aways but rather structures generous incentives in which taxes are funneled to spending. These involve carrots and sticks for spend - everyone will soon have to buy private health care but some of that spending will be subsidized...
- Despite vast state spending, any ostensible welfare or charity is extremely meager. Indeed, budget for normal state expenditures are constantly cut. A large portion of the unemployed still are more covertly supported through indefinitely extended unemployment benefits.
- Projects are constantly rearranged and revamped leaving those dependent on them in a state of uncertainty. Notably, the unemployment benefit extensions are a continual in limbo but continually done. But this approach involves capital trading water rather than putting itself back on its feet. .

And Now A Dialogue On The Future:

From <http://libcom.org/forums/theory/economic-collapse-02122009>

TragicTravisty:

Do you feel that economic collapse is coming? The US debt is ballooning, and income taxes can't

Against Sleep And Nightmare

keep up, the derivatives bubble has grown to astronomic levels, etc? Do you think that in the next decade or two there will be economic meltdown?

RedHughs:

Wow, it is a tribute to modern amnesia that someone can ask "is a collapse coming" when there was, one year ago, in the summer of 2008, a series of events that seemed like a major financial collapse and whose repercussions are still being felt. I guess those events were years ago in "Internet time".

Still, the craziest thing is the reference to "two decades" - if that's Internet time, then I'd say "no", there's nothing to fear, things will like as normal in two months. But in real clock time ... I can't imagine that human beings will be doing well at all in two decades if current trends continue; seriously we aren't doing great now. I'm an optimist; the current economic regime probably will last for another two or three years and the collapse at that point might not be that much more painful than the last one. But in two real decades?, sheesh, one thing I can tell you is that the US trade deficit will not exist in any currently understandable form so that won't be a problem.

Anyone ever heard of a society with a constantly increasing rate of change? I know the reference might have been from a while ago... or will be soon...

Mikhail Firtinaci:

Internet time... A day passes between every check for the "new posts" and further "google searches" that it provokes while I am preparing a paper which has a deadline for tomorrow for the fucking academia.. Now it is 5.24 am and I am preparing a paper on asiatic modes of production... I can not imagine how the peasants felt time in the never changing "asiatic" societies... Internet time it is, yes...

And now from

<http://libcom.org/forums/theory/dubai>

-crash-30112009 ...

Oisleep:

for an empirical example of this view working in practice you only need to look to the situation of when Lehman's went under which had something like 400 billion dollars of CDS's on them - there was an orderly winding up/settlement of the outstanding CDS contracts on their debt and there was very little knock on impact from this particular part of their demise,...

Woah! Seriously? Where were you on Friday 10th October 2008? The moon? The Amazon? A week long ketamine bender? Do you remember this? If you recall, there was a small problem in the lead up to the ISDA auction of Lehman CDs on that date - namely no-one knew ahead of time what the actual figure (the \$400 Bn you quote) for the outstanding CDs actually was, or who held them. Hence it was impossible to estimate the probable recovery rate, or possible knock-on insolvencies. The resulting scramble to hoard liquidity led to a progressive drying up of the interbank lending market - the central circulatory system of global finance - culminating in actual seizure on the day - that spike is notional as trades had stopped at that stage (singularity). That seizure led central banks worldwide to leap into socialized banking system debt, wholesale. While you are correct to say that the auctions were

conducted successfully on the day and the CDs cleared out - to say the process passed by in an "orderly" fashion is bizarre, given that it directly caused the biggest heart attack of the global financial system in the post-WW2 period. I'd call that a bit of a knock-on effect. What next? The Somme - a minor fracas?

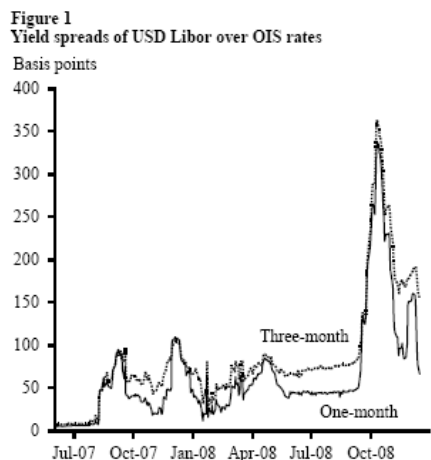
Today, some might think that you would need to be deaf, dumb and blind to not see a gathering storm. Yet many don't see this. The list of fragile and pathological tendencies related to the unstable and concentrated condition of capital is long. The vastly bloated US health care system is one notable example. The graft, confusion, and paradoxes within this monster might make one think about the general state of this society. Yet most people's urge for psychological self-protection consign this or that example to that unexamined realm outside the normal.

So anyway, "The Return Of Crisis" discussed the basic tendencies of expansion, collapse and freezing, a group of tendencies which together produce a "foam," a hollow society where large pieces fall off unpredictably. These notes serve to both update this and make clearer the underlying tendency - the declining rate of profit.

PrudentBear.com and

Thewolfatthedooratblogspot.com together provide far more in depth information than this article could. The charts were taken at semi-random from <http://theautomaticearth.blogspot.com/2009/09/october-1-2009-carcass-of-mother-goose.html> and

<http://seekingalpha.com/article/118369-credit-crisis-watch-some-positive-developments>. These are also good sites. Indeed, one can find perhaps hundreds of well-done descriptions of the elaborate mechanics of the crisis, each concentrating on a slightly different one of its dimensions. This article is not one these good efforts but rather an effort to reveal the human relations and mathematical relations behind all of this.



Adventurers Wanted – Are You An A-Player?

We're hiring the best and we *HATE* the rest! Looking for A-players for whom second best is not an option. *Take our pre-screening quiz NOW!*

When you hear "We work fourteen hour days", you think

- 1) You folks are slacking!
- 2) Wow, that's harder than I work at burger time!
- 3) What was the pay again?

Working for stock options instead of a fixed salary sounds:

- 1) Exciting! I create my own opportunities...
- 2) Like what I've been doing already ... picking up cans and bottles
- 3) Disturbing, how do I know if I'll be able to pay child support and stay out of jail?

Are you an aggressive, proactive, and deadly marketer?

- 1) I am willing to kill or maim to assure the success of your product!
- 2) I have previously organized product rollouts which involved throwing acid into the faces of children, destroying third world food crops and disemboweling small animals
- 3) One word: Chuck Norris!

Are you easy-going, nice, fun, ethical, low-maintenance and drama-free, with a strong desire to build a more ethical society?

- 1) Absolutely. I seek an ethical world in which everyone works eighty hours a week, eats corporate dog food and destroys the competition
- 2) Yes, my ethical qualifications include spying on people using the Internet, tracing people who haven't paid their credit card debts and making prisons run more smoothly!
- 3) Once I've taken my meds, I settle down

Do you feel startups still succeed in the current business environment?

- 1) If you don't expect to make money, you can succeed anytime!
- 2) Did something happen? I've been working 120 hours/week so I'm a bit behind
- 3) The homeless are a growing niche market!

How passionate and committed are you about working for environmental causes?

- 1) Well, it beats when I had to pick the asbestos out of my underwear back at Devastation Co...
- 2) Selling more eco-junk will actually help those cute little seals!
- 3) Why I'd pay you for that job! Well, you might have to

How should startups give back to society during in the current economic downturn?

- 1) If we organize our own exploitation and increase our hours worked without pay, Wall Street might not collapse for a couple more months, even if we collapse from starvation in the meantime.
- 2) Imagine a website to manage your job, an iPhone app to manage your housing, a cellphone to control your kids, a website to find a new husband.... Imagine waking up in a different housing development each morning, going to a different, awful job each day... *everyday is winding road...*
- 3) If we all seize the means of production and organize the vast wealth of this society for our desires rather than profits, then we might live a slower, gentler life where "to each according to their needs, from each according to their abilities" would prevail throughout the world. *Sorry, I can't see what this has to do with Internet start-ups...*

How do you imagine the work environment of the future?

- 1) Flexible, flexible, flexible
- 2) "imagine a boot stamping on a human face - forever" (George Orwell, 1984)
- 3) Capitalist society will impose its crisis, its risks, its confusion and its exploitation on us until we collectively destroy it. The financial collapse of 2008 was a signal that work has entered the final death spiral. We will die in ditches, cubicles, and in front of cash registers separately or we will resistance this insanity together...

Remember, we're looking for *A-players*, winners who are Intensely driven, proactive, and hard working. You also have to be extremely hard working. *Can you do all this and work hard.* Another thing we value is hard work. Work...Work... You'll be starting in a unique work environment. We're five people and two dogs, with a venture capitalist and two computers to tell us what to do. We are currently profitable and we can profit from *you*. You can make a MASSIVE impact here. **Do you thrive on chaos, risk, uncertainty and FEAR?** *Can you dance, shuffle and jingle to the tune of capitalism's invisible hand?* Well, it doesn't matter that much because that invisible hand is going be gripping tighter and tighter whatever you think. *We, the corporate zombies of the world, are the future unless you collectively resist our increasingly insane order.*

Free espresso in the morning, free beer at 6:00pm, free coke at 10:00 pm, free heroin at 2:00am.

Contact: Againstsleepandnightmare.com

Occupy The Unoccupied



Occupy The Unoccupied

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