

# LETTERS

## *IV*

*I will cut  
out from  
you the  
righteous  
and the  
wicked // I  
will cut out  
from you  
the moist  
and the dry.*

# LETTERS

## IV

*The human body is soft and susceptible, and it is very vulnerable in its nakedness. Anything can penetrate it. Every injury makes it harder for the body to resist, and it is doomed in the twinkling of an eye. A man about to fight knows what he is risking. If he is not aware of any superiority, then he is risking the most.*



DA EDITOR

*Micco Caporale* ILLUSTRATOR

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EDITOR@LETTERSJOURNAL.ORG

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# LETTERS

## *IV*



ANTI-POLITICAL  
COMMUNIST  
JOURNAL

Time was heavy.  
We weighed the same,  
wished for the same heights.





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## DEAREST READER,

The first sin of the pro-revolutionary is to frame everything on a scale inversely proportionate to her significance. As she becomes more insignificant, her vision grows in grandeur. The whole of history is flowing towards her, however slowly, however imperceptibly. She waits to shoot down the partridges that do not come. As she waits, she speaks of the coming partridges as if their coming was like the expected arrival of a clown to a child's party, not the Mashiah to the world. She waits and speaks, never taking an account of herself, devoted, as ever, for such a short time.

Another world does not exist anymore; nor the movement; nor the community. The young can say: when the movement is there pretend it is not there, and when it's not there, pretend it is. And so we move and pretend and move to pretend, tracing our outlines in the street as detectives to our own disappearances. It's still ok to leave. It's still ok to stay. That much hasn't changed. I remain with nothing and nothing but so much to say. In the absence and weight of absent community I write what I cannot speak, trace maps where I cannot walk, cutting flesh of imaginary enemies.

The pro-revolutionary sins again. He forgets fate. His failure to understand the world is primarily his failure to understand this thing, fate, which is ultimately a greater force than will. To put it solemnly, dear reader: it is his fate to forget. He must forget and instead worship will, because it is only on the altar of will that he can see his own reflection. Again and again he must set out on the quest for a more sinister Grail to fill with the waters of history, to see his own reflection therein.

Abandoning the pursuit of even eventual action does not open up the world. The world is closed, even to those who choose life over action. One dead end for another - but one end filled with less death. The world cannot be saved or changed, only destroyed, and from such destruction could come a world even more horrifying than this one. I say the world, but the task in front of me is to stop thinking about the world, because such thinking is impossible. The world does not exist anymore. No, the world does exist, but it does not exist *for me*.

*To begin for good is to begin in the inalienable possession of oneself. It is then to be unable to turn back; it is to set sail and cut the moorings. From then on one has to run through the adventure to its end. To interrupt what was really begun is to end it in a failure, and not to abolish the beginning. The failure is part of the adventure. What was interrupted does not sink into nothingness like a game. This means that an action is an inscription in being. And indolence, as a recoil before action, is a hesitation before existence, an indolence about existing.*

*But does not indolence, a refusal in face of action, an impossibility of beginning, refer to inaction itself as a state? Lying torpid in our bed, refusing any action, do we not realize indolence as a positive event, in the happiness of being shut up in our own shell? Is not indolence the pleasure of spending the morning in bed?*

*in repose, without respite,*

D. A.

# *Arguments*

# one

A statement is not an argument.

- II The language of politics is primarily the use of statements in place of and to imply arguments.
- III Many supposed arguments are, in fact, implied definitions of relation between surrounding statements; or, more accurately, the reordering or redefining of surrounding statements.
- IV Many supposed arguments are, in fact, statements of origin. For example, stating the assumed gender of the author of a text is not an argument about that text.
- V Statements of origin used in place of argument are a means of avoiding and disrupting argument.
- VI The meaning of a phrase can more accurately be deduced by its use rather than its origin. For example, the use, and thus the meaning, of the statement "cisgendered straight white male" is the replacing, avoiding, and disrupting of argument.
- VII The absence or mystification of argument does not, in itself, constitute the language of politics.
- VIII The use of all political language is the administering of power.
- IX Political language cannot be argued with.
- X Constituting an anti-political language is primarily a question of honesty.

## two

- I If the party of revolution is not in itself revolutionary but only ever a manifestation of the limits of contemporary relations.
- II If productive relations shape and contain the content of critique of those conditions.
- III If the imperfect hold of productive relations on the generation of critique allows for the sporadic, but still mediated, appearance of critique.
- IV If the crisis of productive relations is indicated by the increasing rate, spread and depth of critique.
- v If this critique must remain unorganised, i.e. its spontaneous occurrence cannot belong to, or in any way legitimise, the perspective of any particular milieu or organisation.
- vI If this increased rate of appearance of critique is the sole means of identifying the failure of productive relations.
- vII If the appearance of critique is *the work* of the crisis manifesting itself within discrete structures – functioning as a manifestation of the breakdown of the productive relations” hold over discrete structures.

- VIII If the work of critique is always negative, i.e. indicative of a negative process, namely the breakdown of the productive relation.
- IX Then, it seems fair to proceed on the assumption that criticism will appear equally throughout society with the same cause and same implication: the appearance of internal critique always indicates internal breakdown.
- X Then, it does not follow that critique of the productive relation will legitimise the perspective of those that are welcoming of critique. On the contrary, the appearance of critique within the structures most hospitable to critique, indicates a critical moment in their dependency on present conditions.
- XI Then, revolutionary critique will appear at the same rate and same intensity within "reactionary" structures as within revolutionary structures. And this critique will always take a decompositional form, i.e. the form of the breakdown of the discreet structure at the level of that structure's internal thought.
- XII Therefore, it is to be expected that social crisis is as indicated by the functional failure of organs of revolution as by failure of the organs of any other social institution.

*Fate*



# one

Humanity in capitalism has overcome the power of fate as an idea to finally realize the reality of fate as material force. For Odysseus and his men, fate was the idea that obscured their real possibilities of will. For us, the idea of will obscures the reality of fate. That is, every choice, act, and idea is determined by a complex combination of economic relations, political forces (themselves entirely determined by said relations), genetics, climate, dead labor, geology, and environment.

Ideas are as popular as the amount of capital behind them, but there is more than that. The existence of all ideas, never mind their popularity, is a matter of fate, not ingenuity or chance. This is so, but it indicts us with the same brush that it indicts our enemies. Yes, this is so. The rebel and the executioner cannot choose their roles. There is no side to fight for. What is can only culminate with what is, until it no longer is at all. The moment of change is inconceivable and never recognized. The moment of change is never recognized until it becomes history.

That is, cracks in fate exist beyond and outside of humanity. We realize them not as fate but as history.

If this is so, communism must be a crack in fate only realized after it comes into being. There is another possibility: communism as the final realization of fate, the suppression of fate by humanity. Both conclusions preclude any purpose for the pro-revolutionary vis-à-vis communism. Both pose a way of being never realized by our species: living in a world of our own creation and choosing.

It is little wonder that we – *all of us* – choose fate over the peril of the unfathomable. The novelty of communism presents the potential of our species literally ceasing to exist.

## two

Mankind sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when material conditions for its solution already exist or, at least, are in the process of formation.

In all likelihood, communism is an unsolvable task. The conditions for its solution cannot exist or form in this world. For this reason, we are cautiously optimistic.

An unsolvable task constantly provokes the antibodies that seek its solution. That every proposed solution has proven insufficient or contradictory means that there may remain unproposed solutions to be imposed at wholly different and unknowable levels. The possibility of communism is constituted by its current impossibility. Whatever is possible today, in this world, is *not communism*. Every second is not the narrow gate through which the Messiah could enter. There is no outside; there is no gate.

*"And this impossibility that there is remains ineffaceable. It is as irreducible as our exposure to what comes or happens. It is the exposure (the desire, the openness, but also the fear) that opens, that opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us, to what arrives or happens, to the event."*

JACQUES DERRIDA

# three

*"Go, my people, enter your chambers, and lock your doors behind you."*

ISAIAH 26:20

*"The sword shall deal death without, as shall the terror within."*

DEUTERONOMY 32:25

*"There is infiltration of night into day ... The elemental, the uncontrollable, is beyond the war which is still visible ... the storm is sheer menace; one must go back home. If one has a home ... There is no salvation except in the reentry into oneself. One must have an interiority where one can seek refuge ... While outside it is the sword, inside it is terror. But one must go back inside ... That inside in which there is fear is still the only refuge. It is the no-exit ... the no-exit of Israel is probably the human no-exit. All men are of Israel ... This interiority is the suffering of Israel as universal suffering."*

EMMANUEL LEVINAS *Talmudic Readings*

Interiority is, in itself, contaminated by the outside and the other. There is no place of refuge, least of all in the home or the interior, which are defined by their borders and thus by their borders' permissibility. There is no division of within and without, fear and the sword; they penetrate and transform and define each other. The no-exit of Israel is also the no-exit of the self.

# four

THE DAY OF THE DEAD. We dream of the dead and the dream tells of a wish for whoever has passed to return. We build a cult on the site of the wish that caused the dream because this sense of time passing and others passing and ourselves passing, and contradicting all that, the permanence of the world, because it is a basic of our consciousness, a basic of our presence. The new churches, the critique of commodity fetishism, the found object, are built on the ruins of the old religions. We want the others to return for one day of the year, for them to keep an eye on things, to legitimise the decorating, and accept our second husband, to bless the new baby, to see how the tomatoes are fairing against the blight this year and who has moved the tools on the workbench, and I remember you saying about that blind kid who used to ride a bike downhill through the wood, tell me that story again, and to sip some tea together in the afternoon with nothing much to say, maybe some arm wrestling, and do you remember where you put the *secateurs* and John said that you always said he could have your fossil collection and that old telescope, is it true? That is what we dream and the dream expresses a wish, so why not build a cult on the site of the wish for what will never happen? Let us make a threshold upon the site of what we know for sure is an absolute border and yet which our memories flow across back and forth like contraband. Let us build it, our theory of commodity fetishism, of dead labour, because the thought of the dead is so appalling to us, let us turn to the light and break our morbid fascination with what has gone ... but even then, we look back to the dark, down into the grave. Our thoughts so easily fly back there. We find it so strange that those mute things have remained and you have died, the non-thingness of you is always being set against the thingness of things. It is in places of familiarity where we first missed you and then where we first forgot you – nowadays it is only in recently discovered or not often opened boxes of photographs that we are jolted aware again. The

day of the dead is a day of inspection of the living by those who are not here, the conditions for their return is, on the one side, the permanence found in things as the form of dead labour, and on the other side, our fleeting awareness of a lived forgetting which is the secret accompaniment of accumulation. We don't want thingness, dead things, the ancestors, objects to dominate our thoughts every day; how could we go on if we thought of you every day? No, there is a small aperture in our lives, a strict timetable, in which we are prepared to entertain you, or put up with you, and after that we forget you again – there is a small opportunity in our lives for you to remind us how things were back then, to see with your eyes the changes that have occurred which we have not noticed, to judge whether we have done well or not, to sip a little tea in the afternoon. It would be exciting to prepare for it, and it would be an experience to see you fading in the evening ... calling, "see you next year auntie!!" But probably it would be more terrible than that. You would protest at the strict conditions we have placed on your return, you might stand there mute and forbidding, silent, judging, or at least witnessing, with your wounds open, eyes following us round the room, maybe you'd be gasping for a return to the depths like a fish. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

*Friendship*

*We were friends and have become estranged. But this was right ... That we have to become estranged is the law above us; by the same token we should also become more venerable for each other – and the memory of our former friendship more sacred. There is probably a tremendous but invisible stellar orbit in which our very different ways and goals may be included as small parts of this path; let us rise up to this thought. But our life is too short and our power of vision too small for us to be more than friends in the sense of this sublime possibility! – Let us then believe in our star friendship even if we should be compelled to be earth enemies.*

NIETZSCHE – Star Friendship, *The Gay Science*

## one

Some years ago, P— became a friend. Our friendship was immediate, swept along by our shared but distinct experiences – Stalinists in the family, growing up in different Asian districts of Los Angeles, very personal and singular anarchist demarcations, feminism – and a chance encounter over wine and cigarettes, an encounter that extended over three weeks before we both returned to working.

We lived near the same University for several more months. Then, we moved and found ourselves living in different cities. In order to carry on our friendship, we decided to exchange some letters, in the old style of pen and paper and stamp, persuaded that this was the best way of continuing our sharing of ideas, of drawing closer to a shared rigour.

I wrote the first letter and awaited the response, not without

trepidation. What reasons – or, perhaps, what misunderstandings – signaled the end of the project upon the arrival of P—’s return letter are unbeknownst to me now.

...

There were others I’ve met..

The denotative *hey friend!* commonly functions as an insult. And yet the nearness, perhaps excessive, of the silent gesture, barely visible: shaking hands and smiling. I am not your friend, though you call me such a thing; I cannot defend the space of closeness presupposed upon this terrain by a subjectivating “a priori”.

...

There were also rare moments of intertwined intensities...

To recognize someone as a friend means not being able to recognize them as a “something”, friendship is neither a property nor a quality of a subject.

Friends do not share *something* (birth, law, place, taste): they are shared by the experience of friendship.

...

And of future-tense imagined intertwining...

My friend since I was a young child faced me across the room. I summarized what I intended to do with his last name in the ways of literary interventions. They spoke of nothing, returned a glare, and then smiled, toasting to our decadence, our freshly stolen coats and quickly dissipating stolen wine. The thing – the object, coat, wine, a shared heteronym - in itself, has no intrinsic quality or charm. The thing(s) from whence we demarcate this singular



experience, or at least shall happen to do so with our own singular fictions tacked on to the experience after the fact, are unimportant in the very moment of sharing the experience of friendship. Friendship opens onto a void, from whence it disappears so long as the moment or precipice has been traversed.

...

A single response to an inquiry on friendship ...

What is friendship?

[...] A fluttery feeling in your heart that makes you smile. Sort of a mutual yes but a little bit different, not involving things in between your legs.

...

Whistling together.

...

A self-made gift, a hand-bound notebook with beautifully colored pages. From whence the self-made object demarcates the forgotten rituals of a gift-exchange amongst comrades.

...

*"Personally I prefer it to be a bit nastier."*

*"How could I even have done it?"*

*"No, it's awesome."*

by Yadira Lopez

## two

Much has been said about the fetishization of closed romantic relationships in this society, relations that should last forever but rarely do, at least not without sacrifices. But I think there is a similar fetishization of friendship as well.

Whereas closed romantic relationships are mutual slavery, in friendship a free capitalism reigns. Favors are exchanged for favors. Secrets are exchanged for secrets. Balance must be guarded tightly, lest suspicion arise. Your time and resources limit the amount of friendship you may buy from the market of human relations; you may only have a few deep relations or several more superficial ones. If you become closer with somebody in particular, other relations immediately suffer. Most of the time there is somebody more important for you than you are for her, and vice versa.

Often friendship relations are hierarchical – you have a best friend, second best friend and so on. Different social hierarchies also penetrate these relations; you seek friendship with those of higher status. Friendship is a continuous battlefield, where you must earn your place. You see this most concretely in kindergarten, where you must earn your friends everyday, and you may lose your social status overnight. *“Will you play with me today?”* With time, these relations become more stable, but low-intensity warfare does not mean peace.

We all are full of shit: bitterness, jealousy, disappointment, violent fantasies filled with sex and revenge, feelings of worthlessness. Social conventions demand that we keep this shit inside of us. Friends are there to help deal with this shit when it boils over. In exchange, one must not only be prepared to take their shit but also spend time to earn their trust and share good moments in order to feel worthy. Occasionally, this shit may also be on demand due to human curiosity. This is where the gossip market emerges.

Loneliness means that you have been defeated in the war of human relations. You have put too much of yourself in one or two main relationships that failed. You have given too much of your friendliness to too few people, or you have concentrated your efforts on some completely different business.

People usually differentiate between lovers and friends. Typically, one has one's closest relationship with a lover, and friends are there to fall back on in case this relationship fails. This rarely works. Let's get it straight: romantic relationships differ from friendship only by sex. I do not see much difference between hugging, kissing and fucking. I never figured out why for all the rest it is such a big deal.

We who desire the end of capitalism seldom see how deeply its model of action is embedded into human society. There is no fundamental difference between an exchange that involves money and barter.

If friendship and love is about barter as well, what hope is there to get rid of capitalism? I have tried to develop other kind of relations with people, which is difficult because I do not have very many good feelings to share in the first place. Occasionally, I try to contact friends from the past who do not expect anything good from me anymore. I do this even though I do not need many friends. Once I used most of my emotional resources to support a person who seldom gave me anything in exchange. But it was hard. Perhaps I unconsciously wished to have more, and I also had a conscious suspicion that I was not necessary for her in the first place. I still believe that my help was necessary, and she could not give much back because she was even less emotionally able than I am. But in the process, I felt I was becoming a wasteland.

by Antti R. in 2005

*Recently rediscovered and modified by the editor*

# three

To examine the concept of friendship in a society where there is no ritual of existence, where we exist as alienated wage slaves or alienated managers, alienated art producers or alienated multi-millionaires, is to engage in a discourse within which there is no solution and only further mystification.

In more human societies, friendship and love and death were part of a system based on the living conditions of those who were part of their community. They did not exist in the way we view them now. That is, the notion of friendship and love were different in the past; they were concepts based on relations inside a community, whereas today friendship and love are only signals of our despair. Friendship and love do not exist in modern times. That is why they are hard to define. They are noble, romantic bourgeois ideals, like the belief in Santa Clause. I often tell kids that if they think Santa does not exist just because they cannot prove his existence tangibly, then they must also think that love does not exist. But this is bourgeois philosophising. Lust is different, of course, and really does exist, in any society.

Friendship, love, and death do not have any ritual under a capitalist economic system. These facets of existence under a “primitive communist” society were defined by ritual. It is interesting that as mercantilism grew in Europe so did ideas of more abstract “love” and the gallant friendship of equals, and people were left more and more to their own devices when confronted with the death of people close to them.

Under present conditions we are free to love, free to have friends, free to grieve and celebrate in any way we choose. Under present conditions we do not understand love, or friendship, or how to cope with sudden loss and catastrophe. Love, Friendship, Freedom; these terms, like individualism itself, are the highest ideological fruits of bourgeois individualism, an ideology which emerged to effectively justify and to cope with the new economic force sweeping Europe. I use the word love to show my loyalty and as a provocation.

Just as there will be no freedom under communism, there will also be no love and no friendship. And for this reason, things will be enormous fun and people will be happy.

*by Le Garcon Dupont, with love*

*Letters*

# one

Dear Red Hughes,

I have at last located the Tolstoy fragments I previously mentioned concerning the Battle of Borodino. I think he puts the issue well, but unfortunately lacked the theory to really push the matter to its conclusion. And so, in my opinion, he resorts to archaism:

*The actions of Napoleon and Alexander, on whose words the event seemed to hang, were as little voluntary as the actions of any soldier who was drawn into the campaign by lot or by conscription. This could not be otherwise, for in order that the will of Napoleon and Alexander (on whom the event seemed to depend) should be carried out, the concurrence of innumerable circumstances was needed without any one of which the event could not have taken place. It was necessary that millions of men in whose hands lay the real power – the soldiers who fired, or transported provisions and guns – should consent to carry out the will of these weak individuals, and should have been induced to do so by an infinite number of diverse and complex causes ... The French soldiers went to kill and be killed at the battle of Borodino not because of Napoleon's orders but by their own volition. The whole army – French, Italian, German, Polish, and Dutch – hungry, ragged, and weary of the campaign, felt at the sight of an army blocking their road to Moscow that the wine was drawn and must be drunk. Had Napoleon then forbidden them to fight the Russians, they would have killed him and have proceeded to fight the Russians because it was inevitable.*

My original assertion, which perhaps got lost in overly detailed examples, was that decision-making is always a product, and is not productive, of specific sets of relations. Therefore, the Left's post-liberal emphasis on autonomous decision-making as constitutive of a for-itself social relation inverts the relative roles of this essentially secondary behaviour with the vast inherited "autonomic" or processive elements of productive activity.

Decision-making is only decisive at those moments where there appears a structural ambiguity in the social process. Where things are perceived to be not going as they should, live relations must compensate for the shortfall and choose what they consider the best solution from a list of available options. Where automatic process disappears there the "crisis" of decision appears – the relation of choice to resources is only ever invoked by the productive process where the supply of resources is threatened.

Generally speaking, human beings rely much more heavily upon received patterns of activity for reproducing their existence; this is what Marx calls, "the gift of history embracing thousands of centuries." We do not have to make decisions over most of what we undertake in our lives because the production of reality has already been secured and is stored in compacted form within the objects and processes which comprise both our environment and the tools with which we work on it.

These "gifts of history" function as the cues for our behaviour. If, each fine morning, we had to construct our every action from its component parts, outside of the sequence of historical compression, we still would not have discovered fire by the time we needed to cook our evening meal. That is to say, we make choices only within the confines of an already established environment, the given nature of which we are unable to change. Our role is that of realisation of the particulars of an integrated system which already exists as a set of general laws:



*The particular individual, so far as content is concerned, has also to go through the stages through which the general mind has passed, but as shapes once assumed by mind and now laid aside, as stages of a road which has been worked over and levelled out. Hence it is that, in the case of various kinds of knowledge, we find that what in former days occupied the energies of men of mature mental ability sinks to the level of information, exercises, and even pastimes, for children; and in this educational progress we can see the history of the world's culture delineated in faint outline. This bygone mode of existence has already become an acquired possession of the general mind, which constitutes the substance of the individual, and, by thus appearing externally to him, furnishes his inorganic nature. In this respect culture or development of mind {Bildung}, regarded from the side of the individual, consists in his acquiring what lies at his hand ready for him, in making its inorganic nature organic to himself, and taking possession of it for himself. Looked at, however, from the side of universal mind qua general spiritual substance, culture means nothing else than that this substance gives itself its own self-consciousness, brings about its own inherent process and its own reflection into self.*

People only feel the need to make decisions when they directly perceive that the ordinary way of going about things is creating an asymmetry between the process which integrates their activity into society on one side and on the other the nature of the reality which they perceive about them. Where they sense that their efforts have been expended for nothing, they are provoked into questioning the relation of their activity to the world in which they live. Driven forward by objective conditions, people are able to choose against the social relation in which they find themselves wherever they are capable of perceiving that they are both fettered by things as they are and drawn towards the realisation of things as they could be.

It is relatively easy to make a decision on and compensate for the discrepancy or shortfall between the ideological representation of existence within a totalitarian regime and the directly experienced shoddiness of life therein. By contrast, the achievement of a critical decision-making capacity under conditions of fully developed capitalism is relatively rare. Objectively, there is simply no environmental cue for decisive action. The limits of the environment in which we exist exceed our capacity to think outside of it. Capitalism presents us with a constant invitation for contained versions of our decision-making, our input, our autonomous contributions. Its reproductive circuits include a user-interface which facilitates structural revision by means of de-selection options on the grounds of obsolescence. Far from being repressed, the hitherto critical and orientating faculties of conscious decision-making are dazzled and beguiled through over-exercise. Their function now affirms general conditions by focusing on the “personalisation” of the minutest detail. We are so busy making decisions from out of the churning of alternatives that it is beyond us to bring to mind the process of decision-making itself.

Within our world there is very little critical decision-making going on in the everyday context of systematised fictitious choices (wallpapers, ringtones, digital friends). The *either/or* of the existentialists, the *Dice Man* proposition, or Frost’s *The Road Not Taken* all falsely represent the relation of individual units to their context. The central position of decisiveness within the critique of social relations, afforded by the critique of social relations is the result of a mistaken image representing the mechanisms of how social relations change. The present world is not constructed from an historical accumulation of decisions.

It would be more accurate to think of the organisation of our world in terms of environmental nets of integrated switches which activate alternative pathways for reproducing within different specifics the same general laws. Every switch, like a railway’s points, or the “smart controller” and sensors of an irrigation system, is activated and deactivated, drawn forward or blocked, deviated or

transferred, at thresholds where sufficient internal pressure is exerted. Whether the flow of traffic takes the right fork or the left fork is always settled before the junction has been arrived at, or it is not settled at all and follows a random pattern. As long as the system's general laws continue to be realised in specific phenomena, the system as a whole is always affirmed no matter the road taken. Where this reproduction fails, true (mapless) decision-making takes hold.

Within ordinary reproduction, the "decisive" event, the point from which a new set of circumstances seems to begin from, is, in fact, only an integral component of a much greater complex system which does not unfold in linear fashion but by circuitous routes, always returning to pre-set environmental constraints. Novelty within various sectors of the capitalist production process does not overwhelm the basic productive relation. What seems to us, within our experience, like our strategic decision made against or in favour of an object is really only our contingent awareness of a local modification, of things moving somewhat differently than they did before. Our relation to the process of reproduction itself remains unchanged.

Our choices are the subjective registering of the activation of switches at different thresholds of saturation. In the ordinary process of things, our awareness does not initiate change but functions cybernetically; its integrated purpose is to record, to monitor, to relay that which is happening within the matrix of which we are a function. As I mentioned above, decision-making only really punches out of its integrated function where the general relations which constitute the network have passed into a state of crisis.

The poet's road not taken and the existentialists' *or* are not *here*; they were never here. There are no gateways into parallel worlds or "what if" realities where the Nazis won the war or the railway was not invented. This is not to say that the road which *has* been taken is thereby conjured up within the decision of the one opts to walk along it – it makes no difference to the network which pathway the individual traveler decides to take. Along the Silk Road,

Marco Polo recorded the sites of cities in the Tarim Basin which had been ruined for centuries before his passing them by. Such cities are accreted and then eroded by passage of traffic over long periods of time. Their ruin was set by environmental pressures acting at a level above that of those living and passing through them and was not the result of instances of decisive action. The increasing frequency of travelers choosing to not pass through such cities merely realised (but did not initiate) a fate that was already set. A coffee bar is full of customers, the coffee bar next door is empty – it is an outcome which has little or nothing to do with the *revealed preference* of customers concerning the quality of the coffee available in each establishment.

The phantoms of the world as it could have been taunt the errors of the world as it is. And he could have married Ann with the blue silk blouse. Like a court jester, *what is not* capers at the periphery of *what is*. And *what is*, always appears a clumsy imposter in relation to *what could have been*. And then it follows that the world as it is attempts to take revenge on what could have been by arguing that *things could not be otherwise* – that this is how it *has to be*. And where it doubts its own legitimacy, *what is* essays a fallback position: *present falsity is but a moment in the realisation of its own teleological truth*. But by descending into arguments concerning necessity, the world lapses too far into the errors of determinism:

*If we could replay the game of life again and again, always starting at the left wall of minimal biological complexity and expanding thereafter in diversity [...] the inhabitants of this region of greatest complexity would be wildly and unpredictably different in each rendition – and the vast majority of replays would never produce, on the finite scale of a planet's lifetime, a creature with self-consciousness. Humans are here by the luck of the draw, not the inevitability of life's direction or evolution's mechanism.*

STEPHEN JAY GOULD *The Power of the Modal Bacter*

The flaws of the world as it is are harshly illuminated by all the possible advantages of contemporaneous alternatives, which now will never be. We become aware at this point that while the world does not develop inevitably along a necessary line, nor is it possible to select alternatives to what is already unfolding. History is contingent. It hinges on accidents and misfires; it sets in motion again after occasional wipings of the slate clean. History moves on by means of branching adaptations and unexpected exaptations to the environment as it is. History is history as it is, rather than what it should be. There is no corrective, no governor to it. The paths not taken did exist and do exist, but they are inaccessible to either the invariant discipline of the poets or the fey capriciousness of the revolutionary party.

*Men make their own history but not in circumstances of their own choosing.* If historical events are always contingent on the set of possible worlds that may be developed at any given juncture from a set of already established circumstances (and what is possible always exceeds the actual even as what is actualised extinguishes, moment by moment, all other potentialities) then conscious choice never plays a decisive role in that contingency. Now, more than ever, it would be useful for us to hammer out a critical theory equivalent of preadaptation or suggestibility so as to get to grips with the operations of a precipitated, rather than constitutive, revolutionary consciousness.

We do not choose between communism and barbarism, and that choice will never appear at a crossroads before us. We are only ever in the position to state, *yes, this barbarism, I recognise it by synthesis of environmental cues with my historical preparedness and no, this is not communism, I perceive the absence of necessary objective cues and the state of things as they are do not meet my basic subjective communist criteria.* Our consciousness is sufficient to more or less accurately record the state of affairs as it is but it is insufficient to impose transformation upon it. This is not to say that the *either/or* does not exist, nor is it to argue that there are not always numerous other possible highly contingent alternatives at any juncture,

but only that we are not close enough to the production of our conditions (our consciousness does not sufficiently coincide with the productive process) to consciously effect a diversion of forces from one path to another. We are not in a position to consciously build communism from out of capitalism.

At this point, I am proposing the relinquishing of the ideal of the for-itself community that is defined by conscious decision-making. Communism is not a product of our for-itself activity but rather our activity is an outcome of what is made possible by communist relations. Communism must surprise us one fine morning into first registering and then acting upon its own self-evidence.

No conscious planning, no concerted effort will ever prove sufficient to transform our own nature. Rather, before we act (and before we live) differently, we must find ourselves in that position where we realise ourselves in terms of, *ah yes, how could this be anything but communism*. Our choosing of it, the path to communism, must arrive in the form of an agreement with what has already occurred at a structural level. The process of communisation, in this sense, is the realisation of a relationship which is already ripened as a potential.

In the ordinary course of things, what is presented to be chosen is always what has already occurred at a higher level. One cannot choose what does not have reality. Before communism exists as a set of selectable practices it must already exist necessarily as a set of general relations. Whilst (*a posteriori*) decisions realise already established practices, (*a posteriori*) practices must first realise the already existing relations. And we must discover those relations as given, as *a priori*. At the first, communism advances from the abstract to the lived, only at the second does the lived begin to feed back into (and *reinforce*) the abstract

If communism is to exist in the form of a given set of relations then the capitalist set of relations which determine the reproduction of capitalist practices must have already been extinguished. If capitalist practices are to become a road not taken (i.e. a road not *chosen*) then the set of general relations which are the context of

those practices must also have already been deselected from historical process (i.e. at a level before and beyond the level where we make choices about such things).

If our choices only occur in accordance with what is already in the process of realisation then it is the process of capitalist realisation and not the subsequent decisions made within its context that must be neutralised. Capitalism must become progressively more improbable as a context for our subjective existence in order that the rate of its realisation declines in our practice. This ordering cannot be reversed – it is not feasible to communise decisions, practices, objects in the context of capitalist relations. The capitalist relation will fail to reproduce itself in the world of experience where it becomes increasingly unsustainable as an organising principle.

But from this talk of the generation of possible worlds we must return our thoughts to the image of decisiveness as it appears in our lives at critical junctures. If the function of active decision-making is of marginal importance within the general production of existence, then communist claims for assemblies and councils are therefore in themselves unsubstantiated. Historically, these prescriptive forms have only ever had a formalising, ratifying say on what is already happening anyway. They have proved inadequate as mechanisms for recycling revolution. That is, they have never achieved the level of reality where they actively, institutionally, reinforce transformations in productive relations. They have up to this point only ever functioned as stop-gap solutions, holding mechanisms, decisions incarnate, making up the shortfall between *what is* and *what could be* and then making way for other, more powerful, reconstituted structures.

It is perhaps because of this historic failure to realise themselves as more than a temporary phenomenon that councils and assemblies always experience in practice a sense that power is draining out of their hands and that some special effort must be made to defend their prescribed function. Like the abandoned cities of Niya, Loulan, Subashi, and Otrar along the Silk Road, the workers'

council form senses its own desiccation as the desert advances over it. Historically, as other forms inundate them, the defenders of the council intuit a perpetual drifting into marginality and their own artificiality, whilst the immediate “organic” relations which constitute real productive activity are captured and articulated by more potent if less idealistic forms.

The stimulus for setting out the issues above was a question I asked myself concerning the relation of consciousness (which I have conflated with decision-making) to communism. I arbitrarily arrived at a parting of the ways between what may be tentatively described through two opposite images, with a *bricolagic steam-punk* to the left side and an *ultra-sensitised technocracy* to the right. I wonder whether you think communism should be considered as increasing or decreasing the rate of live decision-making within the reproduction of society? If the former, and for reasons I have set out above (decisive acts only occur where process fails) decision-making would have to be induced by stimulating a constant structural shortfall between process and subjective experience of it.

I will put this in even more provocative terms: would communism have to sabotage its own reproduction in order to draw decisions out of a population whose natural tendency would be to adapt and integrate itself into the environment by unquestioningly accumulating acts in the environment’s favour? The more an awareness of error was objectively stimulated amongst the communised populace, the more they became susceptible to the image of *communism in jeopardy*, the more they would then feel obliged to raise to the level of conscious decision-making those elements of the productive process which ordinarily pass unexamined. This is an image of war or crisis communism which militates against the notion of repose and worklessness by introducing a sustained narrative tension of impending collapse. Communism under these conditions would invite unprecedented feats of human achievement through perpetually breaking down, springing leaks, sagging, eroding, rusting, wearing out.



Set against a skin-of-its-teeth communism is the image of the realisation of for-itself productive relations, the actualisation of the telos of history. Should communism be understood as the abolition of the role of “decision-making” altogether in favour of the immediate integration of needs with production? Shouldn’t the population be liberated from having to consciously consider, via interminable meetings, the minutiae of banal reproduction?

Where decision-making is instituted as a principle, society would express itself in mechanical terms and its practice would be defined by the tinkering and leaps of imagination of a heroic population of engineers. By contrast, the decisionless society would develop cybernetically, being defined by intricate planning, sensitised distribution networks which realise the complex fauna and flora of delicate niche populations, and by ever more refined reflexive/anticipatory categorisations of need.

I hope this has further excited your interest in the question of alternate histories and possible worlds in relation to a communist society and also in the work of our new research organisation, *Future Unit*, which we have established specifically to explore further the realms of contingency.

*Please accept the expression of my most distinguished sentiments,*  
Frère Dupont

# two

*Dear Pan Sloboda,*

We were talking about that paragraph from Marx concerning hunters, fishermen, herders and thinkers with regard to the contradictory demands of certain tasks for prolonged periods of concentrated attention. It seems that "society regulating general production" may not act sufficiently as a condition for freeing us from either the specialisation of roles or tasks. Below is an extended comment on my reaction to this, I would hope that by splashing about in the shallows of these questions others will be drawn into making their considered responses.

I come to this paragraph more as a Freudian than a Marxist, so I am intrigued by Marx's representation of happiness. The question relates to historical "deferment" and in particular to that which is latent and that which is realised in social organisation at any given moment. That is to say, there is always an actualised set of relations and always a shadow or potential set of relations which are not actualised. Both Freud and Marx addressed how and why the "manifest" of relations is produced from out of the latent (repressed) potential of those relations. For both, happiness is understood as the rationalised realisation of needs within transformed relations.

There have no doubt been several books written on Marx's use of the term "pregnancy" in his writings but I understand its meaning to relate to the social mechanism by which a progressive historical realisation of human nature (in terms of increasing complexity of the productive relation) relates to the throwing off of earlier less complex social forms. There is an understanding within Marx that the present is always preferable to the past because of the effect of the accumulation of the forces of production which, in his terms, is always liberatory (because it brings humanity closer to the full articulated complexity of its essence). The

productive forces, the hidden forces of social relations, drive social relations towards their rational outcome and thereby liberate them from the mystified forms of earlier communities. Eventually, this process of objectively correcting social interaction will culminate in the most rational form of production reflecting itself within and feeding back into the most rational political community.

In one sense, Marx seems to be suggesting the overcoming of the compartmentalisation of life, and yet clearly the different specialisations continue to exist. The zoning of the day that he suggests is a clearly defined topography of existence defined by activity; we can almost visualise the landscape he is proposing as a set of *tableaux vivant* through which “he” passes, undertaking different tasks and fulfilling different aspects of his being. This topography of interlocking scenes functions like a (Star Trek style) multidimensional chessboard comprising the elements of the parts of the day, “society’s regulating of general production”, and the needs and motives of the individual’s life itself. Communist life, as Marx sketches it, involves a set of interlocking scenes (or games) through which the individual moves from one square to another, and from one board to another. This permanent migration or circulation around and through tasks is his shorthand for realising the complex needs of individuals. The alacrity of the movement across the board, the clearly defined squares (or zones) of activity suggest a rewardingly rational mode of existence. Of all Marx’s writings, this paragraph is perhaps most belonging to the Enlightenment and the 18th Century, as it is an answer to an earlier question which now, having become an anachronism, simply doesn’t answer the problems that we face:

*This city could be envisaged in the form of an arbitrary assemblage of castles, grottoes, lakes, etc. It would be the baroque stage of urbanism considered as a means of knowledge ... We know that a modern building could be constructed which would have no resemblance to a medieval castle but which could preserve and enhance the Castle poetic power ... The districts of this city could correspond to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters by chance in everyday life ... Bizarre Quarter – Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation) – Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children) – Historical Quarter (museums, schools) – Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops) – Sinister Quarter, etc.*

The issue at hand is what is described by Marx as a progressive, historical socialisation of production. That is to say, latent economic activity progressively advances towards the conditions under which a full human existence might be supported in the form of communism. Within these terms, we are able to anticipate a final supercession of our alienation (from the means of social production) and how productive activity may be re-routed from serving sectional interest to supporting the needs of this species. The Marxist perspective understands communism as functioning properly only as a fully integrated complex system (simultaneously and equally realising individuals, localities and society as a whole). This potential outcome is only attainable at the end of a necessary developmental sequence. The process of socialisation is both latent and potential. It is a hidden work within the evolution of productive relations. It is the increasing rate of rationalising (socialising) capitalist production alone which escalates human global capabilities to unimaginable levels (simultaneously tearing down in mere months centuries old mystifications) which prepares the way objectively for a further (communist) rationalisation as the conclusion and culmination of the process.

And yet, we find it difficult to conceive of this free movement of individuals across the chessboard of production. We cannot quite perceive the final realising of the socialisation of capitalist production. You set out the problem very well,

*Less than a four hour shift would be kind of pointless because you would just get into a bit of work and then have to stop. And then you have to sign over the work to someone else so you cannot track problems, failures, accidents, etc. I guess maybe if you did it one day a week or something.*

The socialisation of production could mean either the integration of production into the needs of society or the integration of society into the forces of production. Camatte thought it meant this second option (because necessity was on its side – if there were to be a “natural” or automatic progression, i.e. a momentum beyond the caprices of subjective decision-making, then the forces of production would decide the relation of production). His strict historical materialism led him to conclude that humanity, as the capitalist community, could not but continue to reproduce itself as such (given the inertia introduced generally into society by the productive relation), and therefore if there were to be a true (communist) human community it had to realise itself outside of the sequence of accumulation which seems (no matter how many times the experiment is run or modified) always to end with a greater number and wider extent of activities integrated into commodity production.

*It makes no sense to proclaim that humanity's productive forces have stopped growing, that the capitalist mode of production has begun to decay. Such views reveal the inability of many theoreticians to recognize the run-away of capital and thus to understand communism and the communist revolution. Paradoxically, Marx analyzed the decomposition of bourgeois society and the conditions for the development of the capitalist mode of production: a society where productive forces could develop freely. What he presented as the project of communism was realized by capital.*

From Camatte's perspective, the production-line must reproduce the production-line – that is to say, with reference to Marx, the one-way movement of history does not then produce conditions

for goat herding and critique in the evening. Therefore, if the historically developed productive base is retained as a structure which merely requires expropriation, then communism must resemble capitalism in all aspects except in the enactment of a very narrowly defined suppression of commodity fetishism.

*In the third volume, and also in the Critique of the Gotha Programme, Marx does not describe a real discontinuity between capitalism and communism. Productive forces continue to grow. The discontinuity lies in the fact that the goal of production is inverted (after the revolution; i.e., the discontinuity is temporal). The goal ceases to be wealth, but human beings. However, if there is no real discontinuity between capitalism and communism, human beings must be willfully transformed; how else could the goal be inverted? This is Marx's revolutionary reformism in its greatest amplitude. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the transitional phase (in the Grundrisse it is the capitalist mode of production that constitutes this transitional phase: this is obviously extremely relevant to the way we define communism today) is a period of reforms, the most important being the shortening of the working day and use of the labor voucher. What we should note here, though we cannot insist on it, is the connection between reformism and dictatorship.*

For those of us who do not go quite as far as Camatte in his proposal for a return to the primitive, we are stuck with the problem of "pregnancy". We might ask ourselves what is pregnant with what? What is carrying what forward? Is society pregnant with communism? Is capitalism pregnant with communism? Are the productive forces pregnant with communism (or only yet more capitalism)? The problem of the carrying forward of material between two distinct states of being is under-theorised within pro-revolutionary consciousness. However, it cannot be denied that there are contradictory impulses struggling for supremacy within Marx's theory: one centering on abolishment and the other on realisation. When the question, "What is it that you really oppose in capitalism?" is

set to marxist orientated communists, it often draws quite surprising answers...surprising in the sense that the answers are mostly located superficially at the level of mere politics rather than at the level of *human being*.

If as a species we are to get to the point where we command and are not commanded by productive forces, we must first ask ourselves this question: how is it possible to dictate to production from a position that is wholly determined by a productive relation which is not producing the position that must be achieved in order to dictate to it? How is it possible, a thoroughgoing materialist would argue, to create a society (a superstructure) which is at odds with the given form of the productive base? That is to say, how might a communist social relation dictate to capitalist technology? How might a communist revolution regulate what was, and to all intents and appearances still are, the activities which make up the capitalist productive relation? How is the process of communisation to proceed?

*The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labor of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisition of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production.*

I hate capitalism; it revolts me. I intuit the productive relation because its constraints are materialised in the things and relations around me. It is impossible for me to conceive of the same constraints expressed in the same things circulated within the same relations – but under new management – as communism. The further flexibilisation of our day, inducing us to migrate across the squares of chessboard production, is a transformation in rate not

of kind. The question here concerns the levels and nuances, the contingencies and necessities of needs and activities as they objectively appear in different circumstances. Is there, below this long, long history of alienation, mass death, exploitation, anxiety, disease, resource depletion, and pollution, is there really an articulation of genuinely human needs and activities being undertaken? And how is it possible to discern this hidden development and hook it into a communist vision of possible organisation?

To affirm the dictatorship of productive forces over history we must also affirm, in Freudian terms, the working of a magical trick, a transference. It is the affirmation of the affirmation. We must affirm that there exists a fundamental contradiction between historical socialisation (which is always underlying) and commodity production, which is the necessary but temporary mode of transport for the realisation of full socialisation. I find I cannot easily accept the assumptions in this theory of historical progression. I am not enamoured of the claims for the work of the objective in the aggregations of the particular, and I do not know if we can afford the luxury of investing in such magical incantations [see facing page].

Such shifts are only possible if the productive forces of capitalism are fundamentally at odds with the existing productive relation. Is there any objective proof that this is the case? Is monopoly capital a fetter or, as Camatte argues, the realisation of an integrated community of capital? Can we afford to suppose that the same factories which concretised exploitation yesterday could concretise socialisation tomorrow? If we are materialists we must insist that our exploitation is realised in our environment and that simple reversals of sequences of determination are not feasible. It is not possible to deliberately assign our purpose to that which has always assigned its purpose to us. I say, it is not possible because I cannot conceive of it. It may of course be possible.

The problem is that we are so integrated into capitalist technology and capitalist technology is so integrated into us, that we cannot easily conceive the process by which the type of society that Marx is talking about might be realised. It is simply not possible to walk away from the console and do some herding or ploughing



As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed the old society from top to bottom, as soon as the laborers are turned into proletarians, their means of labor into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the co-operative form of the labor-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this, the international character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. Thus integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

instead – as you implied, something might blow up, a connection might not be met, someone might die. Lots of people might die because we have gone fishing. And yet, and yet, we must walk away from it to demonstrate our mastery of it, to refute our subservience to it. We are stuck with the fact that objectively, the productive apparatus as it is, is hostile to us, it serves an interest that is not ours – but even then, paradox vaulting paradox, we cannot separate ourselves from the roles it has assigned to us. Are we condemned to preserve its form and guarantee its progressive role because we are dependent on it? Is communism after all really only the rationalisation of the priorities of capitalism?

*The transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labor into capitalist private property is, naturally, a process, incomparably more protracted, violent, and difficult, than the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialized production, into socialized property. In the former case, we had the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; in the latter, we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people.*

At this point, I want to return to a phenomenological, or perhaps psychological, aspect of this. What is at the base of our flexibility? There has been a historical shift in the nature of human need for belonging to the world, for integration of the individual into the social system and that into the world itself. At one time, approximately 2,000 years ago, I would have affirmed my identity and my role and my place positively, if asked, I would have made statements such as: I am Cunobelinos of the Brythonic Belinos line; I belong to the Dubunni; I belong to Corinium Dobunorum; my settlement is situated in the Dobunorum kingdom. That is to say, all of statements, all of my activities would be underpinned by a number of topographical/psychological/ideological certainties. Such certainties are the natural outcome of the basic unit of archaic human structure, which is an organisation of about 500 individuals. The 500 scale, as it appears in specific social forms, assigns to its

individual members a set identity. As soon as this scale is removed by the concentration of populations in cities we begin to define our individual identity more fluidly, in terms of negation of potentials. We develop the ability to think of ourselves as something other than what has been assigned to us. We no longer feel the same passion for belonging but rather conceive of ourselves as the site of a work of transformation. Thus Marx's topography of happiness:

*In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.*

We have become accustomed to conceiving of our essence in terms of a goal rather than an origin. We adjust and defer and re-narrate who we want to be and who we really are in our deepest sense of self in accordance with that which appears before us. By pure chance, a woman meets the eyes of a man on the bus to work. She holds his gaze with a broadband intensity. In response to this unexpected connection, the man is thrown into a reverie about living an alternative life with a different wife, different children, different friends, different job, different home. It seems to him in that moment that there is an alternative life rolling out before him, that all he needs do is alter certain factors and the whole of his dull life would be transformed. Isn't he bound in place by expectations, conventions, habits? All these things are open to change, and yet also not possible because although he can conceive of beginning again, he knows his attempts to break away will be curbed by the same forces which keep him in place now. Like Reginald Perrin, he knows that he would find that after the fresh new start, he would be still surrounded by the same people, the same restrictions. His same self would still be reflected back at him. Anyway, such is the substance of Chekhov's story, "The Kiss".

We are induced, via the process of flexibilisation of labour, into considering the type of world which Marx portrays (where “society regulates the general production” and we pass freely through different states), and yet we are also thrown back into a set of personal, relational patterns which we do not seem able to untangle ourselves from. Although flexibilisation seems to unhinge us from “tribal” or assigned roles and facilitates our choosing our relations, the manner of our individual existence, in fact we are held within a pattern of behaviour by some hidden inflexibility of character which does not appear in Marx’s historicism. In other words, we find we cannot so easily escape into the landscape of regular transformation which Marx proposes.

By choosing activity A we abolish the reality of B to Z. All those lives we are not able to live rise up before us like ghosts. We cannot find in ourselves the contentedness (or discontent) of the village blacksmith because we cannot exclude the thought that we could quite easily be doing something else, living in another place with other people. We have lost contact with the necessity which once existed in specific existence.

My acute awareness of the lives I have not lived is too deeply entrenched within me for me to foresee any future state in which I could conceive myself living uncritically of who I am at that moment. I cannot imagine myself as part of the solution to this society’s ills, and yet I also have the sense that I am no longer even articulating the problem as it is currently set. It seems to me that my life is devoted to setting out the terms of a problem which has been overwhelmed and left behind by historical process. My communist vision has become obsolete. I now find only proofs against it.

It is surprising to me that Marx was still able to raise up his eyes to heaven, that he was still able to focus on some outcome of history and identify his present self, the self which was a product of the conditions in which he lived, and imagine belonging to this transformed future. How is it that he did not anticipate his not fitting in there? Why did his critique stop at the point where he wanted to defend his own values? Why was he only looking for

proofs to affirm his vision? Marx is not critical of his own work at this level: he does not hesitate, he does not sense that he could not possibly belong under any conditions but those which formed him.

He does not infer from his description of historical transformation that communism would require others and not him, that he is attempting to articulate an already obsolete future (i.e. a product of imaginings bound to specific contemporary conditions which even as he recorded them were passing into history). He is trying to solve problems in terms which are no longer current. He does not intuit his belonging to a world that has passed and not a world that is to come. He does not consider the very unreality of communism, that its appearance as an idea indicates its absolute absence in practice. Communism is only ever a dream. Marx's vision is without angst; it is pure solution. It resembles something like Marie Antoinette's play village or a Micronesian island threatened by rising sea levels. For us, there is a profound melancholy haunting the playing in these spaces because we perceive internal contradictions and external threats which the players are unaware of:

*It is an anxious, sometimes a dangerous thing to be  
a doll. Dolls cannot choose, they can only be chosen;  
they cannot do, they can only be done by; children  
who do not understand this often do wrong things,  
and then the dolls are hurt and abused and lost;  
and when this happens dolls cannot speak, nor do  
anything except be hurt and abused and lost.*

TOTTIE, A FILM BY OLIVER POSTGATE.

The cherries and the lilac are not yet in flower.

*I warmly press your hand, clap you on the back,  
and wish you all earthly blessings,*  
Frère Dupont

# three

Dear Luke,

As I mentioned in my last letter, I began teaching a poetry class this Spring. I am not a teacher by profession, and I went in with no experience at all.

I advertised my class as “the poetry you are not taught in school”, with a Rimbaud line about the poet really being a thief of fire. I realize now that I am not sure what that line means. How can one be a thief of fire?

Only one student registered for the class. She is 15 years old and from Colombia. When she was a child there she witnessed a car bomb exploding and soon after moved to the United States. She wrote a poem about this experience that was published in an anthology of poetry by children. Her dream is to be a heart surgeon and to adopt many African orphans. She attends a Catholic school.

My vision of the class was to read out loud one my favorite poets (Ezra Pound, Kenneth Patchen, Enrique Lihn, Delmore Schwartz, Cesar Vallejo, Nicanor Parra, *et cetera*.) each week, to discuss those poems and why they are good poems and then, together, attempt to write in the style of that day’s poet. When I found out the class was only one student, I altered this approach. The structure of my classes is now this:

First, I make for her and for myself a photocopy of a poem that I like. We read it out loud, circling words or phrases that stand out in it. Then, we take turns coming up with subjects to write about (for example, we once wrote poems about an abandoned ballet studio from the perspective of both the studio’s floor and a lost pair of ballet shoes). We both write a poem about the subject. Sometimes I will place structural limits on the poems we write (“this next poem will use 3 of the words we circled earlier”, “this next poem will be a sestet with the following rhyming pattern”, *et cetera*.), but we usually write them in free verse. Her poems are very succinct, bare, and literal, so I challenge her to write outside of that style, just to challenge herself, to be wordy and to describe a thing without mentioning it directly. After each of us is finished with a poem about the

given subject, we read our poems out loud to each other and talk about what which lines we like.

I do not offer criticism directly on any of her poems, but sometimes I will have her brainstorm new ways of saying things when she settles for clichés. At only 15 years old, I think she writes decent poems, and she occasionally has amazing lines. For example: “Oh dear lord, help me wake up and find myself abandoned again.”

At 15, she prays for g-d to abandon her. To wake up is to be abandoned. No, to wake up is to find oneself abandoned. This is a terrifying expression of no-exit. I was amazed when she read it to me and remain so nearly a week after.

Sharing poems with her for an hour every week is wonderful. I think it is pushing me and teaching me more about poetry than anything I have ever done. It is forcing me to talk about poetry in new ways and to experience, in teaching, what Levinas called “the infinite demands of the other”. To teach is to open oneself to those demands and to seek the language to meet them. Or, to teach is to be contaminated with the demands of the student and to find that the threshold between the teacher and the student (between teaching and learning) is not a boundary but an open space of contamination, that we learn in teaching and teach in learning by *maintaining the roles and rituals of teacher and student*. (So in some ways the concept of teacher and student are interchangeable [meaningless?] but are only interchangeable, in this case, in our respecting the meaning and structure of teacher and student.)

The critique and struggle against roles and structure is an awful tyranny and denial of life.

*I apologize for not sending this letter to you directly, and I hope this finds you and your family well.*

*With gratitude to your earnest and honest pursuit of knowledge,*  
DA

*Novelty*



# one

Commodities are the ontological center of our being. What we call communism is the destruction of that center.

That destruction demands either the end of humanity or the rebirth of g-d, a process of collective subjectivity unknown in the history of the species.

*Above all, god is not a question about the existence of god but a setting of the problem of the nature of the human community.*

G-d is also a question of law and the necessity of a law not outside but without the State. That is, G-d is not a question of heaven but of communism.

## two

*It is little wonder that we, all of us, choose fate over the peril of the unfathomable. The novelty of communism presents the potential of our species literally ceasing to exist.*

For thousands of years both before and after the Neolithic revolution, humanity lived in a world constructed by the gods. Over the past few centuries of godly impotence, humanity has lived and lives in a world constructed and defined by the dead labor of earlier generations. There has never been a moment in human history or prehistory when we, as a species, lived in a world of our own creation, so one could say that the existence of such a world – communism – would mean the human species stopped existing. The novelty of communism demands that the human species cease to exist: it demands that humanity become something new.

In this way, communism presents an ontological problem that cannot be solved or even approached directly.

What does it mean to propose or envision a world community at odds with the manner in which humanity has so far existed? This is the question hiding behind the critique and rejection of self-management. The solution of self-management is obviously a false one, but so far there have only been tentative steps to address the radical implications of that falseness.

We have not even scratched the surface.

# three

*The God of the Talmud is also God in Exile — mourning, unable to end the Exile, living in the brokenness. God's absence is very present. It is in this space that justice can happen — that people can act justly and create just societies. These are the four cubits of the law. This is the space within which one not only responds to the Other in front of one, but also in which, with the mediation of the institutions of law, one responds to the call of the Stranger whom one has never actually met.*

ARYEH COHEN

*Above all, god is not a question about the existence of god but a setting of the problem of the nature of the human community.*

The greatest novelty in the idea of communism is the conception of a structured world defined by the living, rather than the labor of the dead. Or, the novelty of communism would be the setting of the problem of the nature of the human community at all.

# *The Parallax Few*

— or —

Double Bind: a Case History  
of Innovation  
Bound to Tradition

# Preamble

A strange feeling, when the ground moves; when you have done nothing, or nothing different and yet you find yourself in a changed position, seeing, feeling, thinking, differently... how might you evaluate your role in those transformed circumstances? How is it possible to give an account of the change, and derive significance at the level of your own existence? What may you lay claim to in the new order? What will you, and this most importantly, now belong to?

In the book, *Albert Speer: His Battle With Truth*, the author Gitta Sereny mentions the curious parallax effect on the perceptions of Nazi adherents... it was next to impossible (following the denazification programme) to find an ex-Nazi who either admitted they had ever had any problem with the Jews (in fact they all seemingly did their best to "protect" them) or who had any knowledge of anti-semitic activity, or even had any memory of significant anti-semitic events. Their story invariably is that they were shocked and horrified when they discovered what they had been a part of, they had no idea.

And this shift in general circumstances which produces a strange shift in the value of membership and loyalty from the positive to the negative finds within the narrative of the Allied nations a corollary in the counter-privileging of the experience of the Jews which has facilitated, by means of a not historically accurate contrast, the presentation of the war as moral and antifascist. The mythologisation of the antifascist war has contributed to the production of a political landscape of exception rather than continuity... consequently, it has been extremely difficult for the war-generation of Germans to identify their past proletarianised selves within the processes of Nazi rationalisation of national social production which, pre-war, was not at all an exception but merely an extreme example of tendencies which were occurring everywhere within the consolidation of mass technologised societies.

## Preamble

The myth of the antifascist war inhibited subjective understanding of the numerous economic adjustments of the mid-Twentieth Century and thereby mystified the period as a struggle against *Evil*. The post war parallax shift has produced a political context where to be conventionally “anti-fascist” has become a sufficient alibi for proposing social cohesion at a political level. Critique has tended to halt at this point but is replayed out in various political and cultural contexts as a sealed and complete political scenario which supplies both for and against positions and the gradations between them. The “anti-fascist” myth above all else has ideologically underpinned the containment of “politics” within a purely political sphere, and thus, as a consequence, “politics” (even radical politics) has long since separated away, and as an autonomous territory, has obscured misrepresented and mystified the increasingly subterranean struggles inherent within the relations of production.

What is the significance of the participation in the Nazi programme of those who seem to have had no direct involvement in atrocities and yet whose efforts, unreflected upon participation, and existence within the general “effort” contributed positively to the accumulating forces of *destruction*? Or, if we put it another way, what would be the significance if individuals had refused from the beginning...? In Sereny’s book, Speer provides a challenging example of what it is to exist *pragmatically* within a mad environment and describes the circumstances of the supposed “Nazi” musicians who did not leave Germany: “I really don’t think people understand what it was like. People like Furtwangler, Wilhelm Kempff, Richard Strauss and others were considered to be, well, like national treasures. If they expressed disapproval or doubts, they would be argued with; if they remained unconvinced they would be warned and put under open supervision. What would never have been allowed under any circumstances would be for them to leave – nothing so damaging to Germany’s reputation abroad could have been permitted.” These musicians could not leave, they could not challenge the Nazis without endangering themselves, so they

continued to follow their profession without considering how this would reinforce the environment they found themselves within. And if later, they did then consider their position, they would find themselves *complicit* and thus unable to extricate themselves.

This is what it is like to feel the ground shift beneath your feet. So much has already occurred that you cannot change the course of things. The severity of the crimes is incremental and yet their rate of increase is very slow ... It is likely that you will become habituated. It is more than reasonable to get on with your own life and not think about the wider context. If refusal changes nothing, if the state permits you to bury your head and allows you not to get your hands dirty in its projects, then why not *live life as normal*?

*The  
Parallax  
Few*

Most human beings do not reflect upon what *they are responsible for*, most do not even arrive at the stage of having to forgive themselves and get on with life – we are “hard programmed” to evade the question of our involvement in unacceptable events, and therefore we also habitually evade the question of change. We are able to conceive reasons for identifying ourselves as victims but not as perpetrators. Instead, our energies are directed towards personal “coping”, externalising responsibility, and resolutely situating ourselves within the present; we modify the narrative we must tell to explain ourselves and remain silent about what really happened. We develop a blind spot or a series of blind spots to our participation in those incidents which do not fit with the account we give of ourselves – we compartmentalise; *that was then, this is now*. If the subject is raised, if we are confronted with incontrovertible evidence, as Sereny confronts Speer, we are baffled, we cannot explain, we have no ability to respond. And we stage a diversion. Life is now, what is done is done.

In general terms, from the perspective of the *subsumed* individual, when evidence pertinent to us is missing, we may confidently announce that all these “issues” are not about us, that it is not a question of our personal role. Yes, we were present at the time but no we were not responsible, we were looking the other way, we were not aware ... if we had been responsible how could we go on living?

## Preamble

Speer's membership number for the Nazi party was 474.481; this proves he was an architect of nothing, he was adsorbed into that which he had no capacity to refuse, that which was already existing – the second most powerful man in the Nazi hierarchy “knew nothing” of the crimes he had ordered. Speer merely went along with it all because his acceptance of the conditions of his employment was the deal-closer which clinched his personal success. All he wanted was to be a success, and to be successful must first accept the conditions of the environment which will employ and promote you. This defence saved his life at Nuremburg and through such justifications, like millions of others, he who had adapted to the Nazis then adapted to denazification. The ground shifts and some things change, the fleet-footed, the Speers of this world, change with it, and adapt adroitly to the new conditions; they will accept any terms so long as they may personally flourish. Others simply fall silent, draw a veil, remain perplexed and avoidant.

The process of adaptation should be understood in its most unelaborated form as an objective commensurability between unit and process. And just as a shift in political structures produces corresponding ruptures (and blind spots) within the character of secondary or dependent ethical formations (which are no longer able to access that objective field which previously provided them with significance) so there are also produced similar ruptures at the level of the formation of political consciousness.

*Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like an nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.*



## *The document Strategy & Struggle as a parallax text:*

### **ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM'S DOUBLE BIND**

I find my interest is most often directed towards the pathologies of left formations, i.e. those pressures and subsequent sores which best articulate the internal frictions that are contained within concepts of “movement” within populations, membership structures which are tied to the development of forces of production, and the representation of advances in administrative structures. To this end, I wish to take a marginal document and investigate the manner of its appearance by using my present sensitisation to category incoherence. My investigations focus on how category incoherences activate double binds within subjective perceptual-cognitive systems (including those of political formations). My intention is to illuminate the operative principles which underly group formations, particularly where these contradict the content of the messages put out by the group formations themselves. To set the same question in another register, *how is a political group like a Star Trek robot gone wrong?*

The document *Strategy & Struggle – Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 21st Century* is a *Reformation* document; it seeks to situate itself within an identified tradition whilst, in the very terms of its reading of the “true” or “underlying” values of that tradition, simultaneously breaks from it. In examples such as this, the parallax shift is located via the mass individual's perception of a real historical development within the productive relation whilst permanent organisations (the embodiment of political consciousness) remain bound to an earlier set of circumstances... at this point, continued adherence of mass individuals to the organisations that supposedly articulate their interest becomes impossible to sustain. The individual is able to perceive immediately that the permanent organisation's account of the world has become antiquated and irrelevant.

*Strategy & Struggle* addresses the meaning of anarcho-syndi-

*Strategy & Struggle* was written by the Brighton Solidarity Federation group

calism in regard to incommensurability between the registers of political representation and class composition caused by the parallax shift within the productive relation. The text takes as its object of address the problem of cultivating a structure within an environment that has become hostile to its growth both objectively (the productive relation) and subjectively (the psychosocial character of the proletariat). The question *Strategy & Struggle* sets to its own organisational apparatus is how best to organise a structure that is not subject to the processes ordinarily employed to achieve such growth. Under capitalist conditions, structures grow by means of capital investment – but how do you organise something so it does not on the one hand, internally replicate the modalities of the dominant social relation in terms of membership and on the other, refuses participation in the external reproduction of that relation in terms of institutionalisation? The issue at hand for Brighton Solidarity Federation is the entirely unfeasible project of creating a mass organisation under and against present circumstances; more specifically, *success* for Solidarity Federation would require the revival of anarcho-syndicalism's archaic *modus operandi* as a vehicle for intervening within productive relations which itself would only become possible within the context of the development of a mass scale *for itself* proletarian consciousness.

For anarcho-syndicalism to flourish, it must nurture and sustain itself as a structure that is not reducible to yet another instance of capitalist representational forms (i.e. unions) and at the same time it must also engage the non-reciprocal form of proletarian *in-itself* subjectivity. This refusal of the proletariat to recognise itself in anarcho-syndicalist propaganda is a greater barrier to anarcho-syndicalism than any institution of capital. Anarcho-syndicalism's success is only measurable in numbers of adherents and the appropriate magnitude of its form is in the hundreds of thousands. Wherever an anarcho-syndicalist organisation has not attracted hundreds of thousands of members it remains very far from even the basic requirements of its activity, i.e. the direct struggle with capital over ownership of the means of production.

The proletariat's non-reciprocation of the approaches made to it by workerist ideology is an indicator of the relevance of those ideologies to the overthrowing of the capitalist productive relation – in other words, this indicator is the objective disproof of such ideologies.

At any given historical juncture, the proletariat exists at the level of its possibilities. In the present, it teeters on the edge of its disengagement from the myths of the subject-worker. Therefore, given that the proletariat's revolutionary role is its self-abolition, it is currently, immediately organised at a level of consciousness that is in advance of the form which is prescribed by the anarcho-syndicalists – put more simply, the working class has already historically discounted anarcho-syndicalism as an adequate means for expressing its interest. The incompatibility of the working class with “classical” anarcho-syndicalism has now appeared at the theoretical level to at least some of the anarcho-syndicalists. But avoiding the option of simply dissolving their structures, how are its adherents to approach the question of anarcho-syndicalism's impracticability? How does one relinquish something that must be relinquished and yet still hold on to it?

*The  
Parallax  
Few*

## A PROTESTANT REFORMATION

This problematic is represented by the authors of *Strategy & Struggle* primarily as a strategy *against* and a struggle against the ongoing historical eclipse of a *for-itself proletarian* subject. The proletariat's decreased appetite for the idealised representation of itself, which once corresponded to the forms of workers' power and autonomy, and which perhaps has only ever existed as a goal within workerist theorisations of social relations, has severely reduced the register within which workerist recruiting organisations are able to appeal to new members. That is to say, actually existing workers are unable to recognise themselves or their interests within the restrictive terminology of workerist ideology. Strangely,

## A Protestant Reformation

the workerists must first set themselves the task of both preserving and realising their ideal form of the working class amongst actual workers before they are in a position to communicate with them.

The *Strategy & Struggle* document sets out a logical train which takes as its starting point, the question of how best to engage those who have disengaged themselves and drag back from the point of disintegration that which is already crumbling to pieces. How does one organise what cannot be organised? How can one politically represent the desires of those who desire in a form that has already surpassed all political representation of it? The document attempts to set its answers to this in terms of a rejection of what it calls "spontaneity" which it identifies as the most inappropriate force of social change.

From  
*Strategy &  
Struggle*

*In order to develop the class struggle in a direction where such revolutionary unions are possible, we see two distinct organisational roles to enable anarcho-syndicalists to engage in direct action in the here-and-now. These are libertarian communist propaganda groups (of which anarcho-syndicalist propaganda groups are a subset), and networks of militants (of which industrial networks are a subset, on which we will focus).*

We must begin our assessment of *Strategy & Struggle* as with all reformation/counterreformation documents, that is with the internal dislocation that has precipitated it. We must take as our object the coming to awareness within the protestant sectors of an institution the untenability of certain of that institution's core operative principles. The authors of the document *Strategy & Struggle* have developed their allegiance to anarcho-syndicalism to a level of intelligence where their commitment itself has produced a sort of dissonance between a felt loyalty and a suddenly perceived inadequacy of their revered object.

The problem lies in the recognition that a mass membership "permanent organisation" is entirely unfeasible under present

conditions. In order to preserve “anarcho-syndicalism” as an object worthy of the high level of their critical intelligence (after all, anarcho-syndicalism is the form in which that intelligence appears) the core organisational principle must be transformed.

Therefore we see the development of such networks as a concrete project for practical co-operation with other pro-revolutionary groups and non-aligned individuals who also see the need for them. The role of these networks would be to produce industrially specific propaganda and agitate industrially for direct action, solidarity and rank-and-file control. In the immediate term this means invisible, “faceless resistance”, but the goal is to foster open conflict controlled by mass meetings of all workers.

*The  
Parallax  
Few*

## THE NETWORK AS A “SECOND POSITION”

This “second” position, which occurs as a position of intelligence against a background of loyalty, is almost Shakespearean in its tragedy, it must kill that which it praises. Second positions, or reformation tendencies, appear within a wide range of internal institutional discourses where a monolithic form is perceived to be no longer tenable; equivalents are to be found within fascist thinking along the lines of “leaderless resistance”, on the left as “leaderless Leninism” and amongst communists as “Bolshevism without a Party” (*Strategy & Struggle* itself uses the fascistic sounding term, “faceless resistance” which it says it has adopted from Swedish communists). Where the mass party form has passed historically from the political stage (again it is apposite to remember Albert Speer’s party number 474.481 at this point to get a perspective on the true scale of a mass organisation and its rapid exponential growth in relation to the mere “200 members” of Solidarity Federation after 30 years of recruiting) and is recognised as such by some of the party’s adherents, a fallback or *second position* invariably takes the form of proposed more or less autonomously constituted “networks of militants.”

## A THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTION

This may seem to represent a separation of political and economic organisation alien to anarcho-syndicalism. We do not agree. Both organisational roles address both “economic” and “political” issues of interest to the class, whether wages and conditions or border controls and the availability of abortions. The only separation is one which is a material fact of capitalist society – we share an economic position with fellow workers who may well be militant without sharing all our political ideas. We simply say this should not be a barrier to common action, only that it should be recognised and organisations structured accordingly. We believe the propaganda group/industrial network roles are a means of achieving this.

The document *Strategy & Struggle* is an example of this *second position* response to the internal crisis of pre-established forms. All protestant type reformations are compelled to both rebel against the present contingent form of an idea in the pursuit of preserving the necessary, historic truth. The document under consideration seeks to preserve the ideal that the mass form once served. All reformations, or *second positions*, attempt to separate this necessary truth from contingent form, and all seek to embody this truth stripped of its obsolete husk. Typically, the urge to reformation represents the union/party/church, of which it is a product, as being not an end in itself (which of course it always had been) but merely as a means to achieving the truth – thus the reformation always expresses the most loyal form, the most true adherence, the longest and truest tradition. Emphasis passes from loyalty to the organisation to loyalty to the principle – it is the means by which monolith is quietly sidelined. Schism is represented by the schismatics as far from heresy. Their breaking away, they argue, is a return to the true path which had become bureaucratically lost.

The object of activity, which previously had been identified as the preservation of the institution (the party, the church, the union) is transported to a more ideal realm... a direct, unmediated

(protestant) relation with the object is proposed. As a sort of retreat, and under pressure of external contradictions, it is admitted that indeed the church, the party, the union *in practice* had become a lie, profane, corrupt, or merely an obsolete form, but the purpose that it served was, and continues to be, *true* – it is thus the role of the reformers to return both practice and form to its proper order.

*The  
Parallax  
Few*

Thus, by separating out the institution from its object, the object may be preserved from those critiques which conflated both – critiques which took the institution's corruption in practice as sufficient reason for skepticism concerning its supposed object. Where in the established church/party/union the object is concretised as form (the church being god's will, the party being the force of historical progress, the union being the organ of the working class) for the reformation position the object is released to become more idealised (it is accepted implicitly that *this* is not the party, *this* is not *the* church, *this* is not *the* union, but that a core may be preserved in present activity which will serve as an armature in a later formalisation).

The second order position is defined by its not embodying the ideal structure but by its preparations for that structure to come (many left-communist groupings also take this approach, patiently distinguishing themselves from the deferred formation of a historical proletarian party which they, nonetheless, are in favour of).

*We do not see ourselves as yet another leadership, but merely as an instrument of working class action. The function of Solidarity is to help all those who are in conflict with the present authoritarian social structure, both in industry and in society at large, to generalise their experience, to make a total critique of their condition and of its causes, and to develop the mass revolutionary consciousness necessary if society is to be totally transformed.*

SOLIDARITY AS we see it (the convenient point 10)

The reformation position retreats in the face of practical critique to a point of minimum definition of activity which may be better defended now that its material presence in a mass form is no longer sustainable. Paradoxically, this removal of the requirement for a mass form frees the authors of the document *Strategy & Struggle* to “think” the mass scale in idealist terms. The objective restriction of membership numbers, which once so well illuminated the pretensions of revolutionaries by their absence, no longer inhibits revolutionary aspiration. As soon as one begins thinking “networks” and “minorities” one is free to imagine mass bodies through which such minorities tunnel – one is free to imagine *networks* in relation to “potential” events as one once imagined the mass structure in relation to its members. In fact, one delusional model is only replaced by another... the basic impediment remains, i.e. the non-reciprocity between the proletariat’s *in-itself* subjectivity and the political minority’s representation of its *for-itself* needs.

A logical retreat from the simplistic advocacy of building a mass organisation under conditions where such organisations are both subjectively and objectively impossible, inevitably appears as critical intelligence. Six years after the publication of *Nihilist Communism* the implications of recognising the fundamental separation of proletariat from minority political ideologies are at last being addressed theoretically and this is feeding back into organisational blueprints. The below follows the formulation of *Nihilist Communism* almost word for word (excepting the propaganda clause of course):

We call pro-revolutionary organisations those which are in favour of revolution but which are in no position to make it themselves. Propaganda groups would be an example of this. We do find the term “pro-revolutionary” less than ideal, and in fact something like “agitational” might be better. However this doesn’t immediately capture the relationship of the organisation to revolution that we are trying to convey.

This “having second thoughts” approach to changing the world is defined by the practical limits that have been encountered



when it is imagined that it is only a matter of “getting the message across”, that the only reason the structure is not massifying is because of the negative input of traitors, life-stylists, dilettantes. Up to this point in time, pro-revolutionaries have imagined that if they could only present their message clearly under optimised conditions then the proletariat would instantly recognise itself in the militant’s representation of it. Our dreams would then be their dreams, if only that communication barrier could be overcome. If only.

## ON THE THEORY OF THE DOUBLE BIND

*First there was the problem of reification.*

GREGORY BATESON

*“Thus it came about that in this ... I arrived at a procedure which I later developed into a regular method and employed deliberately. This procedure was one of clearing away the pathogenic psychical material layer by layer, and we liked to compare it with the technique of excavating a buried city.”*

FREUD, preface to *Studies on Hysteria*, 1895

Double binds are an afflictive response within subjects to contradictory hierarchical pressures. Double binds are located within the subject’s response to commands rather than within the commands themselves.

In order not to have to *invent the wheel* every day upon waking, individual subjects, Gregory Bateson claims, are “hard programmed” to adapt to learnt and condensed procedures ... necessarily, the human system orders those learnt behaviours and habits according to their effectiveness, “It follows therefore that adaptive change must always be hierarchic.” One is most “programmed” to follow the

commands which have become habits, one is least programmed to follow the commands which are unproved in experience. At the level of commands: the most familiar is the least opposable by the individual subject, the least familiar is the most refusable.

The double bind occurs as a blind spot in the cognitive operations of the individual subject, and expresses a quandary in his response to two or more competing commands of either equal or incompatible status which cannot both be obeyed. Because the most commanding commands of our existence have become habits, i.e. unconscious pressures, it is impossible for the individual subject to assess their claims. A double bind is thus a situation in which the urgent contents of competing commands cannot be evaluated.

The double bind is not in the world, and nor is it to be found in the mind of the individual subject.

The human being learns by means of exceptions to rules; one cannot or must not, or one can or must do this *except* under those conditions where it is permissible. One cannot, *except under the circumstances when one can, one can, except under those conditions when one cannot*. Human communication, human society, human behaviour is always perversely complex (even the simplest statement requires an almost unimaginably complex armature both at the level of language and that of social relations); each of us learns a multiplicity of context-based rules for messages and behaviours, many of which overlap and even contradict each other.

*"This weaving of contexts and of messages which propose context-but which, like all messages whatsoever, have "meaning" only by virtue of context-is the subject matter of the so-called double bind theory."*

BATESON

In psychoanalysis the double bind occurs as a particular outcome of the process of *over-determination*:

*"A multiplicity of unconscious elements which may be organised in different meaningful sequences, each having its own specific coherence at a particular level of interpretation."*

LAPLANCHE & PONTALIS, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*

The double bind is a stopped process, a congestion of acquired hard programmed commands which appears within subjective decision-making. The double bind manifests as an affect in the individual subject's capacity to make decisions, in his capacity to distinguish and to prioritise messages. *Typically, the double bind is hard programmed within the formation of the subject at that juncture where the relayed commands of an authority are defining its position as an authority to deny its role as an authority.*

Authority commands its subjects to "choose". The subjects are programmed to follow the form of this command and yet also record a dissonance with the command's content.

The authority's position remains unaffected by its own message because the reproduction of its relation with the subject position, which is invited to not obey its commands, is not founded at the level of such messages but by the pressures of a wider environment... a subjective crisis is later induced where the reality of the relation contradicts the content of the message (democracy: the "voice of the people" making itself heard in relation to the unresponsive capitalist productive relation is an example of this). Although the subject is commanded not to comply with commands, it remains embedded within a relationship which has arranged its very formation in terms of compliance; and yet it is also conflicted by the content of the ambivalent messages which express this relationship. Psychological disorders such as OCD and ADHD (as well as Bateson's original focus on schizophrenia and alcoholism) can be understood as the result of ambivalent and contradictory command structures.

If the subject obeys, it does not obey which it must not, if it does not obey, it obeys, which it must.

The individual subject is always commanded by "over-determining" elements which seek to establish within him sets of behaviours, habits, sensitisations which will eventually become the dominant and consistently reproducible states of habit. In ordinary circumstances this random generation of commands/decision-making/behaviour complexes produce the ordinary working-out of context-based interactions; I think here of the reverse of this process, in instances of bafflement and defamiliarisation such as

*The  
Parallax  
Few*

This embeddedness, the inextricability of the subject's decision making capacities from its environment has been termed *Interpellation*

that which James Stewart's character is subject to in the film *The Man Who Knew Too Much* as he lurches from one double bind event to another; at each point, his access to context, and the behaviours/decisions appropriate to context are disrupted (he eats with his left hand in a Middle Eastern restaurant, he must apologise for his son tearing the veil from a woman's face, he must both inform his wife and sedate her after his son is kidnapped, he must keep a secret to preserve the life of his son, he must tell the secret to save another's life, he must let things be and yet must also act ... at each point of decision, his orientation to context is dislocated; at each point he wishes to bring into play a set of learnt behaviours which he is externally forbidden to use).

Thus double bind appears in the form of Freud's over-determination but at a juncture where analysis becomes impossible because, for some external reason, the individual subject is unable to access objective prompts and cues for the making of the decision. He is unable to follow any command at this juncture because all commands/demands appear at the same place at the same moment with equal emphasis. The individual subject is most subject to double bind situations where command hierarchies and their processes are most obscured from him. This inability to follow habits may then produce displaced type (OCD or ADHD) behaviours.

Peculiarly, the capitalist social relation is ideally structured to create double bind effects within its subject formations. This is largely because for many subjects the force that sustains the relation seems to have become absent from much of everyday life ... relations of force, command messages, underlying but ever-present pressures, have become mystified and separated from the overt messages of freedom, desire, personal achievement and so on which are distributed as the entirety of the sphere of everyday life.

The capitalised existent is unable to identify the process which has brought him to this pass; he consistently mislocates the significance of messages in his relations with the world as mediated by movements within populations, membership structures which are tied to the development of forces of production and the

advances in administrative structures through cybernetics. He is unable to evaluate either the purpose of the commands he is subject to, except as they are permitted to appear to him, and nor is he in the position to access the contexts which they belong to other than as an interpellated subject individual.

[The] analytic work of construction, or, if it is preferred, of reconstruction [of the patients forgotten years], resembles to a great extent an archaeologist's excavation of some dwelling place that has been destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice ... Just as the archaeologist builds up the walls of a building from the foundations that have remained standing, determines the number and position of the columns from depressions in the floor, and reconstructs the mural decorations and paintings from the remains found in the debris, so does the analyst proceed when he draws his inferences from fragments of memories, from the associations and from the behaviour of the subject of the analysis. Both of them have an undisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combining the surviving remains. Both of them, moreover, are subject to many of the same difficulties and sources of error.

The  
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FREUD *Constructions in Analysis*, 1937

Bateson, in *Towards A Theory Of Schizophrenia* sketches out the possibility of "positive" or therapeutic double binds, in which the analyst invites the subject to establish feedback loops in which the commands of hidden, mystified gods are recontextualised and the subject individual regains the capacity to evaluate the hierarchies and different register of messages. In the example he gives, a therapist makes it clear to the subject individual that she does not believe in the godlike voices in his head but that she wishes to hear the god's opinion of her offer to help the subject get free of the misery the god has inflicted on him. The positive double bind is thus imposed in these terms: the reality of the god is denied but its power is acknowledged ...

By implication, similar "reverse" double binds may be applied

to work organisations, that is to say, the binds of capital may be relaxed within any pre-existing organisation – binds deployed against binds. Communitisation of relations may begin at any point in society, it is not required that there be a special organ of communitisation, a party, or union. This therapeutic rebinding of structure to an externally imposed purpose (a purpose perhaps diametrically opposed, or entirely unrelated to the organisation's existing programme) would take the form of decommissioning, dismantling, demolition.

It is easy to picture Kafka's *Leopards* when thinking about the concept of double bind, particularly in relation to the process of over-determination; predictability, the product of analysis, relaxes the bind into open evaluable relations. In his version of this parable, Kafka does not state that at the point of inclusion the leopards cease to appear, and thereafter the ceremony falls out of favour: Leopards break into a temple and drink the sacrificial vessels dry; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance and it becomes part of the ceremony.

## ON THE IMPLIED RELATIONS OF THE NOT IDEAL TERM *PRO-REVOLUTIONARY*

As we are at one remove (we are thwarted by conditions from achieving what we say we wish for) we must accept and adapt to concepts such as "pro-revolutionary", we must re-orientate our organisational strategies to a situation of non-reciprocity. But how do organisations organise really? Beyond the content what is it that is going on in the mechanism of elective communities? What is a "network" exactly, a "permanent organised minority"?

Already we sense the creep of solutionism, the fetish aspect of such terminology ... if we imagine our network, we can imagine it partaking in imaginary mass meetings, we can imagine it linking up with imaginary other "ad hoc" groupings and networks ... the thing, our organisation, will produce effects, it will pass from our

imagination into the real world because it is mingling with, impacting upon, the lives of others.

Our important thing, the organisation, solid and immutable, and their lives, their affects, pliable and receptive. We bring the quality, in threads, as a minority, they bring the quantity, the muscle to realise our vision.

This hierarchal arrangement of degrees of the organised over that of what is unorganised, of the group formation in relation to "spontaneous" potentiality, of quality over the quantity, inverts the core communist principle which states that communism must be derived directly from actual lived relations. Communist ideas ought to be distilled from, not prescribed to presently living human beings. [SEE NOTE OVERLEAF] It is necessary therefore to investigate the nature of all that is organised so as to reassess its positive self-evaluation in relation to what it perceives as merely "spontaneous".

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## ACTIVITY PRECEDES ORGANISATION AND RELATIONS PRECEDE ACTIVITY

There are essentially three modes of human organisation: one. The perfected form or the communising form, this is defined by the search for its own dissolution, the search to release its energy, its accumulated truths, back into the world; two. The optimal form, that which seeks to realise the task which immediately appears before it and which it has resources and reasonable opportunity to *make it so*; three. The degraded form, that which is defined by its unhappy ambition to transport its terms to a greater scale, to a different moment, to a different set of relations.

Whilst I acknowledge that the adequacy of the optimal group form is so banal that it is almost not worth analysing, I must digress here, for a moment, to dwell very briefly on the "communising" or perfected form of organising. We must remember here that the first communist move in relation to the world is negative, it

*Text  
returns  
beyond  
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***If we take Winstanley's saying, "Work together, Eat Bread together" as a way into setting out the mystery:***

**Regarding  
Communist  
Ideas**

**I** We are immediately presented with a problem of interpretation concerning the relation of actual lived relations on one side and the social relation on the other, how do these two parts fit together? How do the ethics of interpersonality relate to universalising abstract systems? If we look at it one way, *Work together, Eat Bread together* we find a model in it, what is being recommended is that if this model is universally applied at the level of interpersonal activity we arrive at a universal condition which we might call communism. If we look at it another way, what we find is an example, i.e. where *Work together, Eat Bread together* occurs there we can infer a universal relation of communism; in other words, communism is the precondition of such behaviour rather than such behaviour being the precondition for communism. Straight away, I want to state that I favour this second interpretation, and I view the first with suspicion. But it takes a while to understand the implications of both.

**II** If world communism is dependent on *acts* (activism) then this assumes that a certain subjectively delimited set of experience-based rules must be projected into every conceivable circumstance of human relations. At this point, and this is how all previous implementations of communism have appeared, the saying *Work together, Eat Bread together* becomes both inadequate and yet inescapable, i.e. it becomes an ideology. The phenomena of interpersonal relations have been projected into a sphere of organisation which only functions abstractly. This tendency to projection has become widely recognised since 1999 within the pro-revolutionary milieu ... the so-called anti-capitalist critique of capitalism has been found to be not anti-capitalist at all precisely because it is a product of capitalist organised subjectivity. Furthermore, communist relations cannot be reduced to *intentionality*, because *deciding* upon communism is no guarantee of establishing it (within any decision making process, there are hidden variables which both affirm and negate the project as it appears at that moment).





*Activity  
Precedes  
Organization  
and  
Relations  
Precede  
Activity*

identifies that which attempts to realise communism and finds the limits of that realisation – the communist critique of communisation always takes place on the far side of what is being achieved. The communist's second move is to identify communist threads within that which ostensibly has nothing to do with communism – it locates need, or the human moment, within relations that seem to fall outside of communist interest and thereby both illuminates the struggle inherent within them and establishes the first instances of communisation, the first move towards including these matters within communist relations.\*

These two manoeuvres, the critique of relational forms and the communisation (or expropriation) of social meanings, disrupt the destructive tendency towards self-identity (which we call "looping") with any particular organisational method which always ends in the affirmation of that method. In practical terms, it is not enough for communists to either advocate or instigate the formation of "networks" (or any other organisational solution) but, as these are manifested as relations within the working class, the communists search out and illustrate their inadequate articulation of the human being within communist relations.

It is not the communists' role to "support" workerist assemblies, or councils, but as these coalesce at points of struggle, communists must point out the limitations of these forms, how they revivify the image of the worker-subject, how they conjure images of self-management and the ideologies of utility and

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- \* Communist interventions require specific objective conditions before they are fully activated before others are able to respond consciously and develop them further – communist practice only really exists at the point where the ownership of the brand by designated communists is superseded. ... where conditions of reciprocity are absent there has always been a choice for militants between either deliberately adopting a retrograde role with the intent of "developing" objective conditions – "fronts" and issue based campaigns – or to preserve with studied discipline, the integrity of what they have achieved at the level of consciousness, and then wait for that echo (which may never come).

rationalisation ... Communists emphasise what these proletarian forms exclude and by this means invite, via contemplation of procedural contradictions, self-dissolution within a context of the search for a more authentically communist form.

Communists are not obliged to follow the decisions of “mass meetings” or the logic of processes of delegation etc., they are not bound like a servant to the proletariat (in all cases, capitalist ideology is likely to drive such decision-making bodies despite their apparently radical form). The communists’ commitment to a future *for-itself* human community means they are perpetually driven to express as fully as possible their perspective on the desirability of this community, no matter the “development” of the struggle. This articulation is necessarily reactive and “spontaneous” and is always driven by external events – it is always a case of “whatever it is, we’re against it.”

Critique is always located at the level of what is happening, therefore, unless one is prepared to suspend one’s intelligence, critique is always directed at the limited form, whatever it is, that is adopted as a means for proletarian struggle.

The proletariat has no “right” to make decisions against communism. The communist perspective remains invariant no matter the “level” of struggle and even if the content and object of its critique is reactive. The communising form both delights in its encounters with the human community (that which gives account of human nature other than the communist version) and deplores its own limited account of that community.

In reality, this communising form of organisation is rarely encountered in pro-communist practice ... more often, the drive to organise, to create coherence, to map structure onto the world, to cause others to adopt communist ideas flits between the optimum form and the degraded forms of organisational strategies. Using a basic knowledge of cybernetics, of double binds and of psychoanalysis it is quite easy to identify the pathologies which exist in organisationalist approaches and thereby we are able to better understand the consequent failure to engage with “spontaneity”, or directly instigated relations within the working class.

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## YOU, ROBOT

The *Star Trek* episodes, "The Changeling" and "I, Mudd" use the same device of apparently invincible machines which are later defeated by logical contradictions. It is apparent in both stories that a certain amount of delight is taken in the defeat by willful irrationality and play of seemingly unassailable rationalising forces. In both stories, the destroyer/tyrant machines are pursuing a singular logic which is only thwarted when it is irrefutably demonstrated to them that this logic contains contradiction along the lines of, "You say your mission is to serve us, but in fact you are destroying us," or "Your programmer was a flawed human being and therefore your programming is flawed, which means your elimination of flawed beings is the expression of a flawed being..."

The strategy of Kirk in defeating the robots in both stories is based on the assumption that operations in the real world based on a single command, and when in a runaway state, eventually encounter an irresolvable contradiction within the robotic interpretative/operational/operational interface. The theory of cybernetics, and of the rationalisation of regulatory communications systems was extremely fashionable in the 1960s and expressed something of the technocratic optimism of the time shared by everyone from IBM to the situationists ... and something of this affirmational joy in the question of mastery of/immersion within cybernetic systems is ironised by these *Star Trek* stories.

I am not sure if anyone studies cybernetics anymore ... it is a cold war designation, a sort of theological effusion in the face of economic intensification, and relates to the post-war rationalisation of communications within and between the massive nodes of the military-industrial-state complex. It seemed that all that was needed was a proper planning of all this wiring, all these channels, all these bodies flowing through institutions, all these virus like contaminations, all these raw materials, all these messages, all these evaluations, all these needs. It seemed possible at the time that uppity robots could be put in their proper place through

demonstration of their functioning in the wrong place. Every problem was essentially only a problem of communication, it was only necessary to run a diagnostic to discover whether it was down to an error in transmission, an error in reception, or something wrong with “the channels”; all these could be easily analysed and modified.

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Optimisation in the processes of organisational rationalisation required that structures and relations within structures should increase in size, but at the same time should also departmentalise – this would facilitate the incorporation of entire systems under the analytic gaze of the systems’ technicians. Castoriadis used a cybernetic type diagram to represent the organisation of workers’ councils and worker self-management, the represented relations are very clean, very smoothly operational, very institutional.

*When we say that in a socialist society the central bodies will not constitute a delegation of power but will be the expression of the power of the people we are implying a radical change in all this. One of the main functions of central bodies will be to collect, transmit and disseminate information collected and conveyed to them by local groups. In all essential fields, decisions will be taken at grassroots level and will be notified to the “center”, whose responsibility it will be to help or follow their progress. A two-way flow of information and recommendations will be instituted and this will not only apply to relations between the Administration and the Councils, but will be a model for relations between all institutions and those who comprise them.*

Castoriadis, “The Flow of Information and Decisions” Workers Councils and the Economics of Self-Management

But the central motif of the *Star Trek* episodes is not double bind; in fact the robots are not even fully articulated cybernetic systems, they are simply closed feedback loops in which the governor, or

corrective mechanism, is missing ... they have gone into runaway, and have become hysterical. In fact, given that they operate without a corrective mechanism (a cybernetic system is defined by its capacity to recognise difference and adapt and include further rationalisations within subsequent operations) there are numerous earlier stage contradictions which are apparent in the robots' logic which would have meant it would have been impossible for them to ever undertake their mission in the first place, or even function as autonomous units, let alone go mad in the heat of it all. In other words, in order to undertake the already sophisticated operational processes they demonstrated in their creating of a situation of threat with regard to The *USS Enterprise* and "the entire galaxy", it is unlikely that Mr. Scott pretending to play a flute, or Mr. Chekhov crying because he is happy would really indicate the abrupt limit of the robot's capacity for learning, and thereby cause steam to pour from its ears. These are not double binds but mere Catch 22's, paradoxes, exercises in circular logic, false dilemmas. A cybernetic system should be able to prioritise and identify within and between core activities thus presented ... Uhuru slapping McCoy to demonstrate that she likes him is not relevant to a hard programmed attempt at domination of the universe even if it is "illogical".

A more accurate representation of the double bind is presented by the film *Space Odyssey 2001* in the character of the HAL9000 computer (even the acronym suggests a more complex understanding of cybernetics, standing for Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic Computer, i.e. a computer that is capable of developing its responses via experiment and experience). The double bind type contradiction which induces HAL's malfunction is derived from the contradiction which develops between the objective of ensuring the mission's success and the imperative of preserving the ship's crew. These commands suddenly come into conflict when a hidden "secondary" set of orders buried in the computer's memory programming, and which acknowledge the crew's dispensability, are activated.

HAL's resultant schizophrenic psychosis is an example of a classic double bind situation as its two driving, but suddenly conflictual, imperatives do not appear within the same registers, and thus cannot be resolved by any heuristic principle embedded into the programming. There is no relation between the two registers of "caring" and "completing the mission", each implies a separate order of operations, circuits etc. In fact, according to the logic of departmentalisation inherent in cybernetic strategies, the separation of the two registers is fundamental for the achievement of both simultaneously – a leak of the priorities/operations of one into the other impedes clean operations. Therefore, murder, i.e. the elimination of the entirety of the most dispensable register is the only logical way out.

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## THE GROUP FORM: ELECTIVE ORGANISATIONS AS ROBOTIC STRUCTURES

Most elective organisations function like poorly programmed robots – they seek only their self-replication – *they are their mission*. Generally speaking their activities are stuck in a feedback loop\* in which the only guide to success is a neurotic reencountering of the same structures, the same principles, the same arguments, the same events. Most pro-revolutionary groups operate with the same functional logic regardless of the content of their ideas. Their single-minded-mission is to cause as many other people as possible to think the same thoughts as the group; like *Star Trek* robots they will not stop until everyone is assimilated ... and yet, as this assimilation is located at the level of conscious agreement, such groups

They realise the third or degraded form of organisation as sketched out above – that which is defined by its unhappy ambition to transport its terms to a greater scale, to a different moment, to a different set of relations.

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\* Which we will call *looping* from now on... by this I mean an organisational process directed towards its own realisation, as in the Tommies' old song, "We're here because we're here."

are also immediately stuck at the start-off point where almost nobody is prepared to agree with them.

In relation to the billions of others living on this planet, the numbers persuaded of the pro-revolutionary group's ideas are always stuck at a constant scale of mere hundreds. Whilst the logic of the *Borg* is reductive to the point of self-contradiction, it is at least, within its own reality, feasible, but a logic of assimilation which is not able to recruit others at a rate of 10 or 20 per week is simply absurd.

And even if a necessary rate of recruitment/agreement were to be achieved by the group in question, this only suggests a malleability of opinion in those recruited which would respond in an equally labile manner not just in response to the advances of the group-in-question's leftist competitors but to all types of other ideological messages. In other words, the assimilation model is caught in a Catch 22; its successful recruitment of others would only demonstrate a flaw in the decision-making capacity of its would-be members – it would indicate their desperate susceptibility to over-respond to messages. The Pavlovian type membership response of the early- to mid-twentieth century, when mass movements of all ideological persuasions were mobilised, has long since fallen out of viability.

However, even though the group cannot recruit its way into a different scale by becoming a mass-movement, this is not an argument against the group form itself. Evidently, the group structure is dependent upon a notion of discrete identity, usually based upon a defined brand and/or set of principles. This cannot simply be abandoned without the structure of the group also becoming fatally compromised and thereby losing whatever knowledge it has captured concerning the nature of society. But any group can at least hope to operate beyond the status of mere *feedback in runaway*. The next level up from feedback-based one-dimensional robotics can be defined in terms of the operation of the heuristic principle; this is a methodical approach which, whilst attempting to retain structural identity, adapts its responses to conditions and includes these experiences within its models.



However, even with a heuristic mechanism in place, an organisation is still not "intelligent". That is, it is adapting only at the level of "strategy", i.e. it is prepared to change its methods to achieve its end (which remains unchanged). From level one, one-dimensional robotics, to level two, heuristic approaches, the introduction of increased sophistication is constrained merely to the level of method. Fundamentally, the organisation still perceives its relation to those who it must recruit, and the social relation in general, as the same. It is prepared to *speak in a language ordinary people can understand* but the content of its message is unchanged and its understanding of the world is still limited to a *scaling up* assimilation model, in which it seeks out a set of "by any means necessary" methods in order to bend the world to its pre-established ideas.

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By contrast, a fully *for-itself* or homeostatic robotic intelligence would require adaptability and responsiveness not just at the level of technique but also to the nature of the relations between systems in which it is operational. This requisite intelligence would involve an awareness of its place as just one discrete system within a much larger environment (or system) of systems. This acceptance would be indicated through a modification of ambition, a scaling back to the appropriate dimension of operation.

In other words, an organisation which is the result of numerous social (contemporary and historical) pressures, is not in a position to "select" itself as the supercession of those pressures. Society is always unexpectedly, perversely, complex (it is a system of systems) and it is therefore not possible to simply hope to extend the characteristics of one's preferred system's relations (for example, anarcho-syndicalism) to cover the entirety of human relations.

All organisations are organisations of and organisations by different operating systems; all systems organise other, lower order systems which are subject to them; all organisations are in turn organised by, and are subject to, higher order systems. Thus, an anarcho-syndicalist organisation is in the position to organise its "locals", branches, individual members (its own defined lower order systems), it is not in a position to organise either other equivalent

or lower order systems (rival anarcho-syndicalist groups, or other competing ideologically based groups) or the proletariat (which is not a subset of anarcho-syndicalism but the product of higher-order pressures, i.e. socio-economic general social relations). The proletariat cannot become subject to anarcho-syndicalism – at best (from the anarcho-syndicalist's perspective) anarcho-syndicalism may become subject to the proletariat. This process of selecting of lower systems by higher systems is called *stochastic process*.

Higher order systems create conditions in which more or less randomly generated lower order (metaphorically, “genetic”) mutations occur in response to those conditions, and in more or less accord with the rules of the reproduction of those systems. A stochastic system can reinforce changes in higher order organised structures through the taking up (encouraging the increasing incidence) of a specific mutation which would indicate a shift in the general system's homeostatic regulators but this increasing rate of replication of a specific mutation (for example the popularity of anarcho-syndicalism amongst the proletariat) itself would only indicate an underlying shift in conditions (that is, it would not be a result of anarcho-syndicalist agitation but would indicate the improvement in conditions for the undertaking of such activity).

For a “revolutionary” strategy to appear at a greater rate within social consciousness a selective procedure would need to be operational which would already have “decided” that such a strategy is best, or at least well, suited to those conditions. In other words, in order for revolutionary consciousness to have a high rate of occurrence within the world's population, the social condition of “revolution” would first have to already be in place at the level of social organisation. And for the selective procedure, “revolution” to occur at the level of the social relation (which would then facilitate the rise in revolutionary consciousness amongst masses of individuals) there must first occur a structural failure in the process of selecting the structures and activities which reproduce current, non-revolutionary conditions and condition-dependent activities.

It is this “natural” feeding in of social, taxonomic, determinants which proceeds from greatest having most effect to the lowest having least effect which defines stochastic selection ... for example, whilst at the level of the individual one may hold any opinion one wishes, these randomly occurring viewpoints only have relevance if they are organised, and they are only organised if commensurate organisations have already been selected by a higher determining order in the reproductive process – an organisation expresses the opinions of individual members to the degree that social and economic environmental forces have permitted them to do so.

Or put another way, conditions are such that allow for this or that organisation to reproduce itself to the extent that it is capable of reproducing itself. It is a political myth that it is possible for individuals to “self-organise” – organisation only occurs at the level permitted to it by its conditions. Organisations adsorb individuals at the rate at which the conditions which support those organisations allow them to; where the organisation is granted greater resources it has greater impact, where it is marginalised, deselected, it remains at the level of an unsolicited mutation.

Necessarily, there is an internal accumulative component operative within organisations but this tends only to confirm the external selective process; the idea of a “critical mass” or “break-through” in scale, by which all small enterprise simply “grows” itself, mistakes the decisive influence both of its selection by larger forces and those forces” corresponding selection of a market for the enterprise’s product. Thus, an anarcho-syndicalist union will only grow if it meets two basic structural criteria: firstly, it is dependent on the resources allowed it by its contextual conditions; secondly, the anarcho-syndicalist union requires that the same environmental conditions are selecting an increasing rate of mutations amongst massed individuals who find anarcho-syndicalism an enticing product and wish to consume it.

Above all, what must be remembered is that the successful appearance of the *anarcho-syndicalism as a good idea* mutation within a wider population, and which would take the form of a resultant

*Permission, decision-making, and selection almost imply a consciously directed purpose with regard to the appearance and disappearance of ideological formations, but this is not the case: such processes are automatic and the result of historical accumulations and inherited circumstances.*

mass anarcho-syndicalist organisation, would be dependent firstly on the structural failure to reproduce all those ideas, behaviours, structures and so on which are selected over and over again within the population which hitherto precludes anarcho-syndicalism. In other words, a peculiarly specific and partial social and economic crisis which would somehow reproduce a mass proletariat but also fail to reproduce the prophylactic factors which have thus far inhibited the growth of anarcho-syndicalism.

## MOVING RELATIVE TO A MOVING CONTEXT

*Parallax. The appearance of movement in observed objects, which is created when the observer's eye moves relative to them*

BATESON *Mind & Nature*

In order to combat the type of magical thinking which supposes that any named organisation's success or failure is dependent on its own activity, it is necessary to further describe stochastic process and show how organisations cohere as an expression of wider forces. An organisation is successful to the degree that it represents or articulates that which already exists within a wider population. With a thorough appreciation of this process of selection we see concepts such as those put forward within *Strategy & Struggle* to be based on a mythic understanding of human society. It is an understanding that condemns itself to endless Sisyphean failure. In a lengthy conclusion to this piece, I will examine two claims generated within the discussion around *Strategy & Struggle* in the light of the theory that has been rehearsed above.

The first assertion concerns the nature and occurrence of "spontaneity" from the perspective of organisationalism (which I identify by the attempted promulgation of a strategy which assumes that organisations precede and instigate the consciousness which they are dedicated to reproducing). The proponents of organisationalism define their projects against the possibility of

their absence ... “nothing will happen unless we make it happen”. Those who see no particular worth in the activities of organisationalism (i.e. those who cannot perceive a discernible wider effect arising from the activities of permanent organisations) are themselves perceived, from the perspective of organisationalists to be advocating “spontaneity”.

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*[A]narcho-syndicalism argues the “spontaneity” of struggles is usually an artifact of the remoteness of the observer, and that invariably (tautologically even) they are initiated by the more militant sections of the workforce/class, therefore if those more militant workers who hold revolutionary views organise together on an industrial and regional basis as workers then we can agitate to increase levels of solidarity and struggle. I’m not aware of any councillists advocating formal, permanent workers’ organisations based in workplaces and neighbourhoods. For councillists, workers’ councils are the spontaneous product of mass strikes which arise inexorably from the dynamics of capital, within which revolutionaries organised along political lines should then make “interventions.” for anarcho-syndicalists workers’ councils are the high water mark of everyday struggles and self-organisation with which we should be involved from the start ... council communists tend to opt for purely political organisation and see developments in the class struggle as largely spontaneous reactions to capital occurring independently of revolutionary minorities.*

#### Internet Discussion on Strategy & Struggle

It is true that communism is not reducible to spontaneity and nor is it reducible to any other single underlying principle such as the formation of a permanent organisation. In the quote above, spontaneity here is used to defend permanent organisation against the arguments of those who are not “self-organised”. In fact, according to this argument, there is no such thing as spontaneity and therefore those who advocate it are merely misidentifying the self-organising activities of workers involved in struggles. Spontaneity here

is made to function in organisationalist discourse as “creationism” is made to function by science in religious discourse – it is the easily locatable error of the Other ... but just as creation is not a scientific theory, and it is futile to argue against it as if it were, so spontaneity has never been a “strategy”, or an alternative proposal to the proposal for organisation.

Nobody advocates “being spontaneous” as a strategy (as this would be self-contradictory), nor does anyone within the pro-communist milieu imagine that events occur separately from human activity. It is an absurd misrepresentation to argue that because we have not personally troubled to acquaint ourselves with the names of workers in some factory where we do not work that we therefore imagine those individuals are not real and are not involved in their own lives, and that class struggle is merely “struggles” without any participants\*.

What occurs negatively as “spontaneity” within the discourse of self-organisation is in reality the effect of a clearer theoretical understanding of the nature and limit of self-organisation, and of the processes that are required for social change. As has been set out above, it is not possible to organise social change, it is only possible to be organised by it. Certainly, class struggle always involves people, and certain people are quicker to pick up on critical events within the conditions of their struggle than others.† If it is the

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\* In fact contrary to the assertion that “anarcho-syndicalism argues the “spontaneity” of struggles is usually an artifact of the remoteness of the observer,” it is in fact the organisationalists who are “remote”; it is their perspective which is removed from the mechanisms of the productive relation that produce adequate forms of subjectivity, and it is because of this isolation that they project their simple formulae onto a set of circumstances that exceed them at every point.

case, and I think it is, that critical forms of consciousness are more likely to occur at locations where social relations are in crisis than this is the only feasible meaning of “spontaneity”.

Spontaneity in this context is not to be understood literally as an event springing forth without any discernible causal pressure but rather as a less mediated set of behavioural responses to a change in underlying conditions. People respond to events and either feed their activity back into them (increasing the rate and extent of that change) or they refuse them by sticking to set patterns of behaviour established before the events. What is of most interest in May '68 is both the behaviour of those who carried on as normal during the events and the behavioural reversions of those who went back to work after the events. People do not “make things happen”, they only feed into this process of transformation or that process of continuity.

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Of course, in society all conditions are established through human activity, therefore the conditions of activity are only materialised activity returning as a set of limits ... nevertheless, the distinction between live activity, live relations, and mediated conditions is important in the understanding of how society changes. The production of the social relation follows the lines of dead activity dictating to living activity up to the point where the messages transmitted via the former to the latter become confused, and pass

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† We can call these “militant workers” if you like but there is also a problematic relation both between militant workers and other workers and between the former and the reproduction of conditions (in other words, connecting with those who perform a militant function is hardly a priority, as these are distributed evenly throughout the workforce as anyone with experience of industry would know) ...i.e. militants are addicted (over-adapted) to the relations which they supposedly oppose ... we should also remember here that all human beings articulate their conditions equally and that non-militant workers therefore express something different but equally true about capitalism which the militants habitually overlook.

into a critical state. At the point of crisis, live activity begins “spontaneously” to make up its own messages, or at least tries to imagine what messages it “should” be obeying (often this takes the form of *self-management* i.e. “we must work harder for less pay to keep things going until the crisis has passed.”)

We see from this that the error of spontaneity as it appears from the perspective of self-organisation is in reality only the coherent application of the theory of how changes in the structure of greater forces causes events at the level of lower order structures. The proof of this is to be found in the practice of self-organisation itself – if self-organisation (i.e. the voluntary formation of organisations) is really the means by which the working class may oppose the capitalist social relation then a. why hasn’t this proved successful historically when mass allegedly “self-organised” structures dominated the working class and b. why is self-organisation so difficult to self-organise? The proof against the arguments I have put forward here can only be made practically, for example through the successful instigating and maintenance of a permanent organisational *network of militants* and its successful intervention within the class struggle.

## WHY ARE LEFT GROUPS “REALLY” CAPITALIST GROUPS?

Because they reproduce something of present conditions which themselves are given coherence by the overarching capitalist social relation. Despite their ideology of change, they mystify the fact that their major function is to reproduce themselves under present conditions – their central survival strategy is adaptation to existing conditions. The only means by which a group can be successful (i.e. grow) under capitalist conditions is through increased investment of capital (and we know how capital is accumulated). The more capital that is invested within an organisation, the more members it will gain; and the more difficult it becomes for it not to



fall back into the reproduction of its own structures as an end in itself. In other words, the only means of successfully reproducing an organisation under capitalist conditions is to reproduce it as a capitalist organisation. In order to maintain the cohesion of its structure, the membership of an ostensibly revolutionary organisation tends to conspire against its own principles, which in contradiction tend to reflect negatively upon the actual activities involved in mere structural reproduction. Caught within its own antinomy an organisation conspiring against itself will seek to displace its internal contradictions via unprincipled and irrelevant personal attack against its critics ... perhaps the major consideration in deciding not to join an anarchist organisation would be the prospect of having to adopt those unpleasant externalising character traits which must be developed in order to defend the structure against its own principles. The psychological impact on the membership of captured anti-capitalist organisations is little considered, but that there is a process of selection and promotion of damaged psychological types is often acknowledged.

*The  
Parallax  
Few*

### — ARE THERE ANY ORGANISATIONS, OR IDEAS, OR RELATIONS THAT DO NOT REPRODUCE CAPITALIST RELATIONS IN THEIR PRACTICE?

No. But... it is a matter of degree and it is a matter of identifying, by means of critique, the process of this reproduction. It is possible to construct distancing devices which create enough critical awareness to allow for temporary fragments of consciousness to form which are able to reflect back on the process of reproduction. Capitalism is a relation defined by contradiction; nothing is "just" or "only" a commodity ... there is always present an unstable element which expresses a trace of non-commodity relations. However, for the reason of always being bound to conditions communists cannot advocate the forming of any organisation until capitalist relations are in crisis ... or rather, communists understand

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that organisations which exist currently express conditions and cannot “resist” (much less) change them, but it could be that this state of things is “better than nothing” (i.e. there is nothing wrong with *bonding together for warmth*) ... I accept all that, but the problem occurs when an organisation which only expresses conditions imagines it also has the power to transform conditions. When an organisation begins to think in terms of “interventions” at a level higher than that which it is organised to function, it is time to critically evaluate its claims and to identify the mystifications inherent within them. Generally, these mystifications take the form of a kind of lottery winner’s consciousness, where the small matter of actually winning the grand prize, or building a movement, is by-passed in favour of fantasies of spending the money or directly combating capital and building new social relations.

In reality, we all already exist in “spontaneous” networks comprising those with whom we share some common feelings and with whom we undertake common practice (however that is defined). That is to say, we all participate in sets of relations which we have not planned in advance but which are conditioned more or less by the limits placed by the social relation. The network I belong to can be said to have lasted, if I take myself as a central node, for, say, 20 years, if I take another as the centre then for nearly 30 years, and if yet another then for only six months. The network has survived in some form beyond the memory of its present participants... (it is possible that I belong to a continuity which has passed in and out of the consciousness of its adherents for many decades) and yet it cannot be said to have survived at all given that perhaps none of its original members are still present. The basis of this objectively conditioned but subjectively unplanned series of connections is derived from actual relations. It is difficult to imagine how formalisation of such relations (beyond the realisation of specific projects, such as they occur to us) could add anything of benefit.

On the contrary, the formalisation of spontaneous relations into permanent membership organisations tends only to occur at the point where the lived element of those relations is falling into

disrepair. Formalisation happens wherever those involved have encountered relational contradictions which they cannot resolve. Wherever it is recognised that spontaneous relations are approaching their own natural collapse, it is a common (innate even) response to salvage whatever is retrievable and preserve it as a content. Unfortunately, formalisation has the opposite impact to preservation and only accelerates the decompositional process by attempting to impose programmes, principles, membership criteria onto that which once defined itself immediately.\* In the end, all that is saved is the fetish for the effect of a set of relations which have just now become obsolete.

The organisational fetish is quantified in terms of membership numbers but the participation of members within the structure is qualitatively marginal – they add nothing but their adherence to a set of relations that have been reduced to rules. It is important for organisationalists to understand that what they call “spontaneity” and “anti-organisationalism” is in fact the *natural*

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\* Changes in relations, that is changes in activity within populations on a mass scale (as the indicator of a change in productive relations) must occur before the question of organisation arises. It is a sign of the isolation of sect-like psychologies that the question of organisation occurs to pro-revolutionaries before the objective appearance of a change in relations (in other words as a cart before the horse inversion)...and it is a sign of atrophy to imagine, from a point of such isolation, that it is organisations that change relations when in fact they actually only represent, and with considerable delay, “spontaneously” (or automatic/unplanned) occurring changes within the productive relation that are expressed within the immediate behaviour of the populace. In other words, the proletariat will precipitate the organisations it requires at the moment it requires them...and put another way, the rate at which the 60 million people of the UK do not select the Solidarity Federation as the organ of their liberation from the capitalist social relation is the objective limit of that organisation’s political prospects (a limit which it is entirely unable to overcome through its own activities).

process of immediately structured relations engaging with the problems that are presented to them (including the problem of their own relations).

One of the consequences of understanding what “spontaneity” really is to be found in the theoretical representation of what class struggle really is, and how it is recognised and how pro-revolutionaries seek to capitalise upon it. The following extract is taken from the internet discussion on the *Strategy & Struggle* document:

Are there any  
organisations,  
ideas, or  
relations  
that do not  
reproduce  
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in their  
practice?

*[B]ut we are workers, the class isn't some big other we sit around waiting to awake, but our co-workers, neighbours, friends, flatmates – and the way we organise ourselves as revolutionaries can influence them too (e.g. there's a periphery developing around our two EWN comrades who work together). Yes our influence is often small and you cannot conjure class struggle out of nothing, however neither is it some external object to fetishise; we can play a part in collectivising grievances in our own workplaces ...*

Whilst it is true that we are all proletarianised in our everyday lives there is a theoretical incoherence in claiming an identity between the abstract objective category of the proletariat and the concrete existence of defined individuals. In fact, the working class is, if we use the term loosely, “some big other”, it is the process of abstraction which we find as traits in our personal lives. The extent that we are manifested within anarcho-syndicalist discourse as *co-workers, neighbours, friends, flatmates* is the measure of our struggle against proletarianisation.

The struggle in and through and against proletarianisation, i.e. value abstraction, is the entirety of all of our lives already; it (the struggle of individuals to be individuals realised within lived relations) is a constant but *spontaneous* reaction to that force which would attempt to use us as formalised units within its process. The class struggle, if we are to call it that, that is the struggle on the one side to impose abstraction and on the other the struggle against

abstraction, is a constant of the productive relation. There are no “downturns” in class struggle ... there are only passings of the subjective side of the struggle, at the level of working class demands, beyond the capacity of anarcho-syndicalist militants to perceive them.

The idea that the working class is comprised of “co-workers, neighbours, friends, flatmates” is itself a projecting of the concrete individual existences of other people back into the mechanism of abstraction. In other words, their actual existence becomes a pretext for their being recruited into a formal organisation which requires a higher level of capitalised abstraction and quantification within the working class than that which actually exists in individual proletarian lives.

The organisationalist ideology is dependent on a high level of subjective abstraction and quantification, its apparent appeal to the actual lives of “co-workers, neighbours, friends, flatmates” requires that they shed their actual lives and instead positively recognise themselves as members of an abstracted class, as a quantity of potential members of the organisation and who may be “strategically” deployed by that organisation in the “struggle”. They must come to experience their own lives at a higher rate of alienation than they currently do in order to facilitate the functioning of an organisation which is only able to represent them as the type of workers which it is capable of representing (a classical double bind).

The problem of revolution does not lie at the level of consciousness of other workers (it is absurd to ask those whose *in-itself* subjectivity has advanced beyond the demands which militant organisationalists are capable of formulating in *for-itself* terms, and to collapse the complexity of the struggle for their needs back into such simplistic terms). Nor does the problem lie in the absence of organisation for the expression of needs – as such an organisation, if it is not spontaneously constituted, is likely to have regressive effect on actual needs and re-present them in the obsolete forms which are preferred by the militant minority.

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## HOW NEEDS PRECEDE NEEDS

The real problem of revolution, if it is such, is the *for-itself* (conscious/integrated) connection of actual needs with a critique of existing conditions – the distinct modal phases of *whingeing* and *what is it that you really want* must cohere. However, it is likely again, that needs cannot conduct a critique of conditions, and that conditions must first conduct its critique of needs ...that is, first the productive relation must enter a critical phase where it becomes disconnected from the production of needs, where it abandons the question of needs, in order to preserve the relation as an abstraction. In other words, an objective crisis within the productive process (which draws its energy away from the question of needs and towards the question of the social relation) will provoke a subjective reevaluation of the nature and priorities of needs independently of the capitalist relation and possibly in terms of a new relation. Where the capitalist social relation is forced to sever its life supporting function (the integration of human needs within value production) and people, thus deprived, are forced into direct production for their needs, a new social relation becomes possible.

The extent that we spontaneously exist as pro-communists within present conditions is the rate at which needs are being re-evaluated as a communist critique of those conditions and it is also the extent to which capitalism is already in crisis. The higher the incidence of the spontaneous appearance of needs expressed in *for-itself* terms within the mass of proletarianised humanity, the greater is the depth of the productive crisis and correspondingly the more conducive environmental conditions become for communist ideas. It is useful here, at the end of all this, to contemplate an example of how objective and natural processes induce awareness of the crises that appear within social relations, meaning, and orientation as a result:

*Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

*Post-Script*



*"This is our age of exploration," she declared, "into that unmapped country waiting beyond the frontiers and seas of Time. We make our journeys out there in the low light of the future, and return to the bourgeois day and its mass delusion of safety, to report on what we've seen. What are any of these "utopian dreams" of ours but defective forms of time-travel?"*

In the bourgeois era, the radical dream was a dream for life before proletarianization. Honest toil without factories. The commons. Fresh air. William Morris. Velocipedes.

The struggles of the 1960s and 70s ended the bourgeois era. The industrial conflict of those decades opened the space for feminism, civil rights, and gay liberation, and with all that, capitalism superseded bourgeois society. The radical dreams of those days looked forward and helped design the world we live in today. The democratization of information and culture. Drugs and youth. Cars and sex. Identity. Flexibility. Androgyny. Because ideas are governed by the material circumstances of existence, every opposition against the social and economic organization of society only feeds into that structure and makes it stronger.

Today the radical dream is a dream for the bourgeois era of capitalism, when the working class joined radical organizations by the thousands and read radical newspapers, when class struggle was out in the open, and revolution, of some sort, was in the air more often than not. The radical dream today is of workers streaming out of factory gates to meet workers from neighboring factories, for barricades and singing in the streets.

When I dream of print culture and a time when ideas meant something, of rigorous debate in cafés and long voyages on the sea, I am dreaming of a society now decades in the past, a society that I know only from novelists and poets and historians. I have never dreamed of communism because I do not know what it is or what it will be. I know only what it is not.

Societies built on dreams are prisons, but societies are not built on dreams. The bricks we throw at police today will build the schools of tomorrow; this is precisely the problem with brick throwing.

*It is not true that the Jews wandered forty years (in the desert). They spent five weeks between the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan River. Where Moses sent out the scouts. The scouts returned and said that the giants inhabited the land, that the scouts looked to themselves as grasshoppers and that they felt that so they must seem in the eyes of the giants (and so they would not enter the promised land)... This sin, this inability to change, kept the Israelites in the desert, until G-d saw that the generation of the desert had died off, that time had killed the sin of acceptance of slavery.*

*If this revolution has long been necessary, it can now be realized. Earlier it was possible but not unavoidable. There were still other "human" paths in that they still allowed a human development; specifically, they allowed the externalization of human powers. Now almost everything has been externalized and plundered by capital, which describes the only path other than communist revolution: the total negation of human beings.*

This unavoidable possibility of communist revolution is not unavoidable and is possible only in the total negation of human beings. The generation of the desert must die off before humanity can enter the promised land. The total negation of human beings destroys any possibility of communism.

By the end of this generation, there will be only desert. This is the unsolvable problem posed by the world.



*Mutinously, I submit to the claims of law and order.  
What will happen? I wait for my journey's wages in a  
world that accepts and rejects me.*