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Editorial

Everywhere in the world, capitalism is triumphant. Under the banner of private enterprise, price and profit, Capital has routed its enemies - those whose opposition has been carried out in the name of 'Socialism' - and banished all thought of different possibilities. From the radical conservatism of the UK, France and the USA to Gorbachev's perestroika (restructuring) in the USSR and the Chinese Responsibility System, the same reinvigoration of capitalist social relations is taking place. Everyone is learning to think of personal freedom solely in terms of 'market choices', and to identify 'society' in terms of the nation-state, while nobody, it seems, is asking what kind of life we are being trained for or what we can actually do to determine the future ourselves.

What is disturbing is to find so little serious interest among the Libertarian Left in what is actually happening in the world today. An inflexible conventionality marks both the thinking and the activities of those who claim to be forces for change, while it is the Right which is confidently promoting a profound social and cultural transformation.

One of the main articles in Here & Now No. 4 was 'The Invasion of Exchange' contributed by The Pleasure Tendency, based in Leeds. This article began to map out the changes currently taking place under the auspices of the 'Enterprise Culture' and those we intend to explore further in subsequent issues.

The present issue addresses itself to the form of life presently unfolding with the revitalisation of capitalism, and seeks to re-establish the possibilities for new forms of radical theory and practice.

In 'The Power of the Powerless', Steve Boshell examines the relevance of the work of the Czech dissident Vaclav Havel for the anti-capitalist opposition in the West, and finds a central theme to be the complicity of individuals with systems of power. He affirms the political importance of individual responsibility and personal integrity. This reassessment of concept of the 'Moral Subject' clearly throws open serious questions rarely asked about the character of political practice on the left.

A further way in which radical theory has fallen short of people's actual experience is in its under-valuation of the symbolic aspects of social life. Radical ideas which have emerged from the realm of art and culture may seem to have had a greater grasp on this than economic or political theories as such. Three articles in the present issue explore this dimension: 'Gift Against Commodity' by Deborah Jordan, discusses the subtle perversion of the symbolic exchange on which human reciprocity is founded by the extension of the logic of commodity and exchange-value; while Mike Peters in 'Noted on Credit' addresses the symbolism inherent in capitalist economic relations themselves, arguing that the purest form of capital - that represented by finance-reveals money itself to be essentially a symbolic expression of power. 'Art and Fashion in the Age of Exchange', by Peter Sutphen, discusses the subordination of critical thought today to the logic of fashion and the corruption of the 'radical' pretensions of artistic work contained in the hypercapitalist banality of 'Postmodernism'.

The endless proliferation of pseudo-novelties in the domain of culture and academic theory extends also into politics. Impatience for the supposedly new calls for a deeper understanding of what is really specific to the present, and of how the present is really placed in relation to the past. In 'The Third Assault', Gus McDonald proposes a brief overview of the history of radical theory in the form of a schematic framework of three stages. This constitutes an extract from work-in-progress and is intended as a basis for discussion and debate. Replies to this will be published in the next issue.

The social forces working to change present-day society are often identified as being the feminist, black, ecological and peace movements. The 'New Social Movements' appear in 'Eurovision, Social, Ecology', as do those, and other collective identities, created outside of capitalist commodity relations and conferred a privileged basis for transcending those relations. Colin Webster, in his article, considers the claims for this transcendent potential of such movements in a more skeptical way.
The Power of the Powerless

On Twelfth Night, ten years ago, a white Saab was stopped by a number of police cars in downtown Prague. During the search that followed, about 220 envelopes, ready for posting, were discovered. Inside the envelopes was a document which heralded a thaw in the Central European condition which has remained unheard of to this day. The document was Charta 77 (which unfortunately had other means to arrive at its rightful destination) and the occupants of the car, who were released shortly after midnight, were Pavel Landovsky, actor and playwright, Ludvik Vaculik, novelist, and Vaclav Havel, playwright.

Histories of the Charta 77 phenomenon are available for anyone who is interested. Suffice to say it did not spare power, it did not inaugurate workers’ revolution, and not one drop of the oppressor’s blood was shed in its name. Instead it suffered and continues to suffer repression, vilification, and the kind of mundane and random persecution which ordinary people find most hard to bear. Hardly, viewed from the machiavellian porthole of modern politics, a success, yet in its isolation, its insisting power, its tactics and its principles it has shown a way out, not only for Central Europe, but for all who labour under the systems of totality which characterize societies in our world.

In 1978 Vaclav Havel wrote “The Power of the Powerless.” Within these pages can be found much of the character of Charta 77, as well as Havel’s own analysis of the Central European condition. I am not going to review it in the traditional sense. I am going to take for greater liberties with it than that. I propose to attempt to apply both the spirit and the advice contained in this book to this side of the Iron Curtain, and I hope to do it without diminishing Havel’s specific indictment of ‘post-totalitarian society’*, nor by pretending that all systems are the same anyway. Havel’s essay does look in our direction, not only in his recognition of the Western sources of the totalitarianism of the ‘East’, but also in his awareness (in a passage which initiated a Spectator review) of the dangers inherent within the present West:

In highly simplified terms, it could be said that the post-totalitarian system has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between citizenship and the consumer society. Is it not true that the far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social auto-totality have some connection with the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity? With their willingness to surrender higher values when faced with the trivializing temptations of modern civilization? With their vulnerability to the attractions of easy indifference? And, in the end, is not the pervasiveness and emptiness of life in the post-totalitarian system only an inflated caricature of modern life in general? And do we not in fact stand (although in the external measures of civilization we are far behind) as a kind of warning to the West, revealing to it its own latent tendencies? (page 39)

* Havel’s phrase for the socialist societies of today.
There is a peculiar aura of innocence around the system, because of its ideology that it is simply the rational technology of power. And with the spurious innocence of the system comes the concomitant complicity of every individual with it. It is not then, a structural change which could improve human life in the system, because the crucial line of conflict exists nor at the structural but at the individual level. It runs right through each individual, such that everyone is both a victim and a supporter of the system. Differing positions in the hierarchy merely establish degrees of involvement.

The assumption which runs throughout Havel's book is that the individual exists. Not the bourgeois individual of acquisitive bent nor its modern narcissistic counterpart, but an individual in which there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence. This individual has moral choice, the choice of living within the lie or living within the truth. The sense of responsibility for the 'system' is located within the person:

Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way. Therefore not only does the system alienate humanity, but at the same time alienated humanity supports this system as its own voluntary masterplan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people's failures as individuals. (page 38)

Rather than find a better system to create better lives for people, by living better lives will a better system come into being.

This reawakening of the notion of personal responsibility for the way one lives is not some rash finger-pointing at the failure of the master to perform, but a recognition by Havel of how much the system's automatism fills our everyday lives with its petty improprieties and ritualized relationships; how the seemingly normal and innocent acts of the everyday feel the very arrangement that stifles our being.

Havel's exclamation of the individual, as something far richer than the 'subject' constructed by the sterile materialism of either official Marxism or the 'rational choice' school, acts a swash through the partial individualism of Western Europe and America, where the individual is barely recognizable as a full human being. There, his role in public affairs is diminished, rarely outside the confines of the family is he asked to perform an adult as opposed to infantile task (in fact the assumption is that the modern subject has hardly matured). What little social connections he has amount to little more than membership of a community of consumers, so that, to use Havel's words, he is as far from realizing his longing for rightful dignity, for moral integrity and a sense of transcendence as his Central European counterpart.

Similarly, Havel's identification of the individual complicity upon which the system runs mirrors the self-administered economic conformity by which the Western powers exist. The dominance of the notion of exchange-value as a natural, given and external relation between people which enables other relations to be marginalized to the boundaries of, at best, eccentricity, and at worst, criminality (as the binding of The Travellers throughout the eighties has shown) exists because it is accepted as Truth, the one truth which does not founder on the shifting sandbanks of human uncertainty. To my knowledge, Havel has no critique of the commodity, but his description of the way his system functions has a familiar ring:

Part of the essence of the post-egalitarian system is that it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favour of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general amanuensis and servants of its self-
meaningful for that, it is the quiet courage of the brevement victimized because he suggests a better way for brewing beer. In telling the truth, Havel says, he had become the 'dissonant' of the Eastern Bohemian Brewery. 'Dissonants' can be found on every street-corner. The genuine aims of life sit beneath the automatic functioning of the system.

In the same way, I consider, when facing the spurious universality of the commodity, with its flattening out of human beings into soul-less 'demanders' and 'suppliers', that 'small-scale work' (the surreptitious survival of gift, acts of trust, transcendence of money-thinking, the refusal to cause or induce another) takes its place not merely as part of a hypothetical opposition, but as life lived within the truth, as its own justification. It needs serve no political cause. And, of course, with our experience of a public sphere plagued by the manipulation of emotions, the 'pseudo-science' of signs and the death of honesty, the notion of a parallel pole (an alternative realm of public debate) appears not merely attractive but essential. The emergence of the citizen, both bourgeois, proletarian, and the carrier of any other spatial identity, prepared to accept the responsibility of the existence of others, could animate a parallel public sphere to a quality that could replace the cynical gaze of the official, without passing through the blooey experience which seems to have most significant transformations this century.

The absence of awe, or at least of bare-as-a-value ideology, marks out Havel, Charter 77, and the Polish movements from previous expressions of a deep-seated desire for change. It should not be confused with realism which Havel regards as craven submission; if nothing is worth dying for, then nothing is worth living for. But it is a turn-away from the ruthless politics of power, a recognition of the experience of such politics and a rediscovery of values such as redemption and forgiveness. In part this comes from experiencing the endless cycle of oppression-rebellion-oppression, and is an attempt to break out of this by never allowing the ends to justify any means, in part it is Central European post-revolutionary scepticism. Having experienced the Millennium, the genesis of the end of uncertainty, they have found it wanting in humanity, engaged as it had to be in Jacobin surgery to replace the human with the prosthetics of Socialist Man.

For Havel, there will never be a cause that can demand and justify a single involuntary death. Human perfection is not on the agenda, therefore not anything can be done in its name. This revolutionary fatality is the result of having a view of the limits of the human condition.

According to Havel these limits exist in nature, just as we are constrained by ecology as to what we can do with our environment, so we are constrained by our nature as to what we can do with our humanity. Technological hubris and unhumbled individuals are seen as going together. Technology is:

-the symbol of an age which seeks to transcend the limits of the natural world and its norms and to make it into a mere private concern, a matter of subjective preference and private feeling, of the illusions, prejudices and whims of a mere individual. (Politics and Conscience)

Havel sees the fulfilment of the individual as dependent upon the transcendence of individual desire. Such sentiments run against the rise of modern Western politics, with the possible exception of the Greens (with whom Havel does admit some affinity). The notion of a universal human condition is not one readily accepted by modernist radicals, who have always seen such ideas as emanating firmly from the conservative camp. However, it would seem that the experience of the century will point to the need for firmer grounding of what the genuine aims of life are other than the elevation of personal desire (whomsoever might be doing the elevating, Mrs. Thatcher or Ronald Reagan), and most certainly the funeral bell has tolling long and hard for those ideologies which have proclaimed the end of moral dilemmas, the end of uncertainty, and the institution of Paradise where subject shall lie down with object in dissonant harmony. This is the end of the end of History; a recognition of the eternal recurrence of struggle.
In many ways The Power of the Powerless is a descriptive, rather than theoretical, work, or rather, as the best theory often is, it merely describes what is already happening. In its scepticism tempered by transcendence it translates the perceived absence of revolutionary modernism in Central Europe into very good, very common, sense. Although it does not preclude combative struggle, in fact it is "living within the truth" upon which such struggle depends, the experience of the Czech and Polish movements undermine the pride of place given the combative personality. The power of the powerless exists in the everyday refusals to live within the lie rather than in the purity of a grand ideological, who challenges all in theory and very little in practice.

Havel gives us a principle about how to fight totalities, without isolating our own, by identifying the human, rather than science or history as the source of society. Central Europeans (and their Soviet counterparts) have discovered that no matter how dark and how total oppression appears, the heart of real life still beats, and exists as a constant potential challenge to Power. That beating heart can be found in our system too, in the practices that side-step power and money. Escaping the prison of "collision-course" politics and its inevitable marginalisation, these practices suggest a "non-normalizing" unity between people, one in which both the dispossessed rioter and the incarcerated pensioner could find a home. Outside the confines of conventional politics another future could be born.

For the real question is whether the 'brighter future' is really always so distant. What if, on the contrary, it has been here for a long time already, and only our blindness and weakness has prevented us from seeing it around us and within us, and keeps us from developing it? (The last lines of The Power of the Powerless).

Steve Baskett

Notes.

1. Contrary to popular prejudice, Charter 77 was not simply an intellectuals' movement, but always had a large section of working-class signatories, which at times formed the majority. Recommended reading: Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia: Writing.

2. Circulated throughout Czechoslovakia in rumour form, it sparked off further debate and discussion. Published in English by Hutchinson (Palach Press) at a prohibitive price in 1985. If anyone wants to read it, they can borrow a copy from me, if they write to The Pleasure Factory, 123 Box 106, Leeds LS1 3AA. Vaclav Havel was released from prison in 1985, after serving four years for membership of the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Persecuted.

3. Adam Michnik, a Polish 'dissident', writes in his letter from Warsaw Prison to General Kiszczak:

As for myself, I hope that when your life is in danger, I will be able to appear in time to help you as I did in Otwock when I helped save the lives of those few of your subordinates, that I will be able to place myself once again on the side of the victim and not that of the victimizers. Even if, afterward, you should once more wonder at my incorrigible stupidity and decide to lock me back in prison all over again.

The celebrated incident at Otwock occurred when a crowd attempting to lynch a policeman was calmed by Michnik's dramatic intervention. His opening sentence began:

"Listen to me, my name is Adam Michnik and I am an Anti-Socialist Force."

4. 'Politics and Conscience': address by Havel to the University of Toulouse, which he was unable to deliver in person. February 1984. (translated and published by The Satisfactory Review).

Défense de s'asseoir
No sitting

Défense de rester debout
No standing

Défense de toucher
Don't touch

Entrée interdite
No admission
Gift Against Commodity

"But it is a cold, lifeless business when you go to the shops to buy something which does not represent your life and talent, but a golden testimonial. This is it for kings and rich men who represent kings, and a false state of property to make presents of gold and silver stuffs, as a kind of blackmail."

R.W. Emerson's "Gifts and Representative Men"

A couple of months ago, a local news programme carried a report on the Queen's birthday. A reporter visited a local primary school to see what they thought about the Queen's birthday. Naturally, they all said it was a splendid idea. One of the questions put to them was: "If you could afford anything in the world, what would you like to buy for her birthday?"

What rendered the question meaningless was the way it turned the whole notion of gift on its head. Had the question been worded: "What in the world would you most like to give the Queen for her birthday?" (Which, after all, was the question that was being asked), it would have had a completely different import. We have come to associate the notions of "buying" and "giving" in our minds to the point where we no longer clearly recognize the totally opposing implications that they have with regard to human relationships.

"Buying" and "giving" involve different levels of transaction and, consequently, we attempt to combine them in one notion, for example, that of the "gift," it can have a distorting effect on the perceptions and relationships between human beings.

There exists, for example, at the moment of presentation of a gift, a very delicate balance in the relationship between the giver and the receiver - a balance of power and mutual respect - and, although the roles are reversed, it is certainly by any means a one-sided relationship. One is bound by the obligation to accept a gift, and it is presented in the interest of another person; and there is, as everyone knows, as much enjoyment to be had from giving as there is from receiving. However, should this relationship be in any way undermined, then the balance is likely to begin to fall. If, for example, the primary concern in a transaction of gift-exchange becomes the "cash" of the gift, as so often is the case, then the relationship becomes fundamentally altered.

The intervention of money brings about an arbitrary value of a gift. Is it appropriate to exchange a gift for money? The value is imposed on it from the outside, by the system of commodity, which interprets the relationship between giver and receiver.

Thus, a gift that appears too "expensive" or too "cheap" causes embarrassment and necessitates excuses on both sides. Phrases such as "I'm sorry it's not much" and "It's the thought that counts" are answered with "You shouldn't have said that." An "appreciation" is not a category of the commodity, it is the gift itself. It is the gift that signifies an appreciation.

Advertisements in shop windows and magazines tell us to present the "ideal gift" for her. The emphasis is on the perfect gift, in the sense of something that says "I love you," or something that expresses the thought that is right for her. But the gift is only a symbol of the relationship that exists between the giver and receiver.

"The gift is the thought that is right for her." It is the thought that is right for her, not the thing itself. The thing itself is a symbol of the relationship between the giver and receiver.

The gift is not a thing, it is a thought. It is the thought that counts, not the thing itself. The thing is merely the symbol of the thought that counts.

The gift is a way of expressing love, not a way of expressing "love." It is the thought that counts, not the thing itself. The thing is merely the symbol of the thought that counts.

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to go out and buy something. We must not, on the other hand, spend too much for fear of appearing too "flashy" and running the risk of causing great embarrassment. It seems that the act of giving is no longer the most important element in a transaction of gift-exchange.

Other criteria are imposed from outside, as though the system of commodity-exchange is unable to allow the existence of any levels of human interaction which are not completely under its control.

It snatches them from us, gift-wraps them up in its own glittering paper (as well as in a symbolism that is no longer our own) and offers them back to us at its own price. Everything must be brought under its own sphere - nothing must weaken its unifying strategy.

Gifts fail against the rationalist economic system of the commodity in that they preserve the notion of 'difference' in both content and form. In contrast, the commodity seeks to reduce qualitative difference, expressive of a relationship, to a relationship expressive of quantitative difference. But, despite the commodification of 'gift' in our society, we can still join Marcel Mauss in believing that it is our good fortune that all is not yet couched in terms of purchase and sale**.

Discovering means of protecting gift without transforming it into 'the unique commodity' pur excellence - a precipice upon which it is always trembling in modern times - could halt its drift into the realms of nostalgia.

* M. Mauss The Gift (London 1966)
There is a lot of loose talk now about the Credit Explosion, and the Burden of Debt, both in this country and in the world at large. The Labour Party in particular has been arguing that the present consumer boom is solely based on credit, and thus is both shallow and likely to be short-lived, and even portends an inevitable 'Day of Reckoning': a crash or catastrophe of some sort. A familiar set of phrases accompany this kind of analysis: 'paper profits', 'fuzzy money', 'phony jobs' (as against 'real' jobs), 'making money as against making things' etc.

This moralising materialism, of course, based on a (partially) correct sense of the fundamentally anti-social and insecure character of capitalism, but it is vitiated by a (wholly) unSound grasp of the culture of capitalism, and betray a complete failure to investigate or challenge the social meaning of the 'wealth' to which capitalism is devoted. In the notes below, I'd like to take the critique of credit and debt a bit further than is usually done by economists - whether 'bourgeois' or 'marxist' - and try to consider credit and debt as a SOCIAL RELATION: that is, as a relation of power replete with ideological symbolism.

But first: some figures indicating the scale of debt today. We are getting used to being told about the sheer extent of indebtedness in the world. The issue is not confined to the Third World. While Argentina, for example, is said to 'owe' some $52 billion to the international bankers, and it is in the big league of debtor nations, the United States itself nominally owes about $200 billion to creditors in other countries. Among the other indicators of American indebtedness are an estimated Federal Government debt of $2.1 trillion and a total U.S. consumer debt of $2.2 trillion (compared to a total debt on the part of the Less Developed Countries of only $1 trillion). If these figures make your eyes glaze over, don't worry. The ultimate meaning of such in calculable magnitudes lies in the social consequences rather than the numbers themselves.

On a more down-to-earth level, the growth of personal debt in the U.K. has been put at about 20% a year (compared to an annual growth in wages of only 7%); the average household debt in Britain is currently around £2,000, and the INTEREST on such debt is equivalent to some 9% of all household income.

What is Credit?

To inhabitants of a society of consumption, credit presents itself to us, as Fanon said*, as something we are being "offered". It is portrayed as a facility for enhanced consumption as much as a requirement of production - and almost as one of the entitlements of the consuming citizen.*

But we all know these enticements for the services of such flexible friends simply camouflage the figure of the old familiar archetype of the Siphon, who only lends in order to ensnare us in the bonds of his interest.

What is so hard to grasp about credit and interest, though, is neither its underlying motive nor the arithmetic of the percentages at stake, which we can easily work out our respective costs and benefits, but rather the nature of the credit relation itself and how it is enforced.

Interest is not the "price" of what is lent, because only things which are actually sold - alienated - have a price, and whoever lends money does not renounce what he appears to hand over. In fact when money is represented as being lent, nothing in fact is changing hands at all. When a bank agrees to lend you money, you are not handed a pile of notes in a brown envelope or anything which can be construed as a transfer of possession as

when a book or car or house are sold. What usually happens when a loan is made is that a contractual relation is entered into which circumscribes the power of the debtor. What the borrower gets is something much more conditional than the current terminology suggests. In effect what takes place is a transaction very much like a feudal contract in which there is reciprocity but no symmetry. If you are an entrepreneur, you may not or use the money to make a profit, but the bank will get its return, some what may.

Let's look at this further. What is very rarely considered is that in making money loans, banks are actually creating credit, which amounts to saying they are inventing money which did not previously exist. This may sound familiar enough to students of economics, but some of the forms of credit-creation which have expanded most dramatically in recent years - specifically that represented by credit cards - have somehow been forgotten about by both economists and governments. The vast increase in the use of credit cards (and this includes a large part of the way executives are remunerated) nowhere figures in official calculations of the 'Money Supply'.

**Credit/Debt as a Moral Category**

It is a truism to point out that debt was once considered morally disreputable; there are still many people who disapprove of buying things 'on tick', and who would never dream of possessing a credit card. It is quite arrogant and highly presumptuous of contemporary commentators to mock such attitudes in the condescending tone which suggests that we have a greater insight into reality than those poor bright-eyed people with those antiquated prejudices.

I want to suggest that there are moral ideas embedded in the categories of debt and credit, and that the old-fashioned anaethma of debt contains a more profound sense of what credit is all about than the sophisticated 'technical' discourse about the nature of money, credit and interest which comes from economists.

After all, what does it actually mean to say that someone 'owes' something else to someone else but to posit that some sort of obligation is in fact in force upon that person. Hidden behind the fetishised phenomena of the Commodity/Money system, in which it appears that prices are the objective material properties of goods, and the circulation of goods obeys natural laws that can be entirely explained by a 'science' called economics, is the irreducibly social fact that goods serve as the mediation of human activities: the system of commodities doesn't make 'morality' disappear; it rests on moral notions which predate it, and it generates its own moralities. The system may in practice violate its own morality, but that doesn't mean that morality can be exched as irrelevant.

What is the moral basis of the critique of credit? Quite simply it is that what appears as the 'giving' of something is really the imposition of an obligation - an obligation, moreover which doesn't conform to any norms of reciprocity, since it is not true that anything is actually given at all.

* This relation between debt and power can be seen in the Ancient Roman lexem (bondage) whereby a person who could not repay a loan forfeited their status as a free person and entered - literally - into slavery.
Consider the way the medieval taboo on 'usury' (interest) was phrased:

"To receive usury for money lent, in itself, unjust, since it is a sale of what does not exist, whereby inequality obviously results, which is contrary to justice."


... it is monstrous and unnatural that an infernal thing should give birth, that a thing specifically sterile, such as money, should bear fruit and multiply itself. Therefore, when profit is made for money, not by laying it out in the purchase of natural wealth, its proper and natural use, but changing it into itself, as changing one form of it for another, or giving one form for another, such profit is vile and unnatural.


Similarly, in ancient communities the charging of interest was prohibited on loans between members of the same community; the Jews considered the charging of interest from fellow Jews in the same was as other peoples did (the association between the Jews and money-lending only arose out of the position they found themselves forced into in medieval Europe, where they were permitted to break the Christian taboo on usury and were then ripped off by their 'Christian' overlords, this 'dirty' money being legitimised by legal theft after the fact.

What the medieval theologians found abhorrent in usury is nevertheless still of relevance. It was abhorrence of the hegemony of insatiable things over human life, and of the inexpressible power of intellectual categories (interest is a purely mathematical notion) over real social and above all, moral, obligations. The fundamental social problem we still confront is that the imaginary necessity which 'requires' that a debt be paid (or that 'interest charges' must be deducted) does seem to be stronger than the moral necessity for the hungry to be fed.

The theological critique seems more applicable than economic one. It is not unrelated to the religious anathema against sorcery and magic; the impulsion to things, to objects, of divine powers.

That money (conceived in the middle ages in its material form as coinage) could somehow appear to bring forth its own automatic increase, that (the mere possession of money could bring an unconditional increment of real wealth) regardless of the social role or moral virtue of its possessors, was a violation of Christianity like the belief that certain magical objects could be used to bend spiritual forces by mechanical causality.

The well-known paradox of compound interest - the geometrical progression by which, as the cycle goes, if Jesus had invested a penny at 10% interest he would now own the whole world, expresses the difficulty of comprehending the ethical basis of interest upon credit and behind this, the ontological status of money as capital. It is the height of folly to pretend that the modern mind understands these things any better than the medieval mind.

Money is something profoundly 'magical' and 'superstitious', as Marx was at such pains to emphasise by invoking the concept of ' fetishism'.

The modern idea that money is simply a notional device simply flies in the face of the reality of money and how it is in fact treated in capitalist society. People just do not behave that way.

Money and Magic

In 1914, the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss put forward the suggestion that the concept of money, as it functions within everyday social consciousness, is directly related to, indeed is historically rooted in, the notion of magical power.*


After illustrating various notions of such a magical force in several non-European societies, Mauss pointed out that the objects deemed to be endowed with these magical properties were usually objects which played a role in *symbolic exchanges* in those societies: they functioned at the centre of social rituals associated with economic and political as well as *religious* events; the imputation of supernatural power to things derived, in other words, from the symbolic functions the things acquire from their social uses.

He then suggested that this has important similarities with the way the institution of money operates in Western societies:

"Money - whatever definition one adopts - is a standard value, it is also a *neo-value* which is not fungible, which is permanent, transmissible, which can be the object of transactions and uses without being deteriorated, but which can be the means of procuring other fungible, transitory, valuable, possessions, benefits. Now the totemism and its possession have ... played this role as objects coveted equally by all, and whose possession conferred on their holder a power which became *exactly a purchasing power*.

This magical power, however, is a *social power*. Ideas of a magical force such as the classic Polynesian category of *mana*, are not just believed to reside in material objects and ritual acts, but are the form in which the social power and authority of specific human actors is conceived.

The power of a chief, is a real power, symbolizing the force of the clan, and this power is imagined to reside in the symbols and insignia of the 'role' of chief.

The earliest forms of money, Mauss suggests, were not things employed in the acquisition of means of 'consumption' and everyday technical 'utility', but in the acquisition of 'luxury' goods, and especially those of *auhai* over other people. The purchasing power of primitive money is first and foremost the *prestige* that the totemism confers on whoever possesses it and which serves as a sign of command over others.

**CAPITAL EXPLAINS ITSELF**

'The contract stipulates if the total monthly amount of loss of time benefits, promised for the same loss under all valid loss of time coverage upon the insured person, whether payable on a weekly or monthly basis shall exceed the monthly earnings of the insured person at the time disability commenced or his average monthly earnings for the period of two years immediately preceding a disability for which claim is made, whichever is greater, the company will be liable only for such portion and amount of such benefits under the certificate as the amount of such monthly earnings or such monthly earnings of the insured person bears to the total amount of monthly benefits with the same loss under all such coverage upon the insured person at the time of such disability commences and for the return of such part of the premiums paid during such two years as shall exceed the portion of premiums for the benefits and repaid hereunder but this shall not operate the reduced total monthly amount of benefits payable under all such coverage, upon the insured person below the sum of $100, or the sum of the monthly benefits specified in such coverage, whichever is the less, nor shall it operate to reduce benefits other than those payable for loss of time.'

OLD REPUBLIC LIAINSHARDS COMPANY
OF CHICAGO 1976

"But is this not a feeling still very much alive among ourselves? And the faith which we have in gold, and all the values which follow from this valuation, is it not in large part the confidence that we have in its power? The essence of faith in the power of gold resides, does it not, in the belief that we can obtain, thanks to it, from our contemporaries, the benefits - in kind or in services - that the state of the market permits us to demand?"

This magical, symbolic dimension of money is inescapable in the institution of credit. The very idea of 'interest' as a percentage increment upon a sum of money, is the most 'mythified' form of surplus value, as Marx said, and Marx was no less emphatic about the inherently 'occult' character of the everyday notions involved than was Mauss.

It does seem, however, that we live in a system in which human relations are not simply 'represented' by, but are *regulated* by, imaginary arithmetical transfers of numbers across national *accounts* - thus people in Brazil physically suffer because a legal fiction called 'Brazil' has to 'pay' a financial tribute to equally fictitious banks (and nothing physical actually changes hands in this latter transaction).
Art and Fashion

"The pleasure of writing, of producing, makes itself felt on all sides; but the circuit being commercial, free production remains drugged, hysterical, and somehow bewildered; most of the time, the texts and the performances proceed where there is no demand for them... so that kind of collective ejaculation of writing, in which one might see the utopian scenario of a free society (in which pleasure would circulate without the intermediacy of money), reverts today to the apocalypse."

Roland Barthes (1)

"... our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve."

Fredric Jameson (2)

The tendency toward an apparent 'end of History' implied by the remark from Fredric Jameson given above can be traced, despite its prominence within recent debates on postmodernism, to at least the middle of the nineteenth century. A notable example is Baudelaire's well-known definition of modernity as 'that which is ephemeral, fugitive, contingent upon the occasion... half of art, whose other half is the eternal and unchangeable.' (3) This theme of the intimate relation between modernity and the rapid turnover of recent and contemporary cultural imagery can be found in Walter Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire. Benjamin presents this poet as the first artist to recognize the change in the status of art which occurs about in the nineteenth century. With capitalism art becomes a commodity and the artist, having lost the aristocratic patronage afforded him (4) in earlier times has to take his chances in the marketplace. It is a question of fashion, of taste. 'Taste develops', as Benjamin puts it, 'with the definite preponderance of commodity production over any other kind of production.' (5) 'Fashion', he elsewhere remarks, 'is the eternal recurrence of the new.' (6) History thus treats water as commodities repeatedly, and with its ever-increasing rapidity, circulate, dissolve and reappear.
As for the current situation: it would seem that with regard to 'postmodernism' as a label designating 'out' times the prefix 'post-' is, as David Frisby suggests, somewhat premature. (7) 'History' has of course continued to take place - we are no longer immersed in the nineteenth century but Baudelaire's succedent account of modernity has not been rendered obsolete. Mass culture, a novelty in Baudelaire's day has for us become the norm, the general background as it were. Despite considerable developments its general function has not changed. As Roland Barthes suggested in 1975: 'The bastard form of mass culture is humiliated repetition: content, ideological schema, the blurring of contradictions: these are repeated, but the superficial forms are varied - always new books, new programs, new films, new items, but always the same meaning.' (8) Even ideas have been reduced to the status of fashion. (9)

In their article 'The Invasion of Exchange' (10) the Pleasure Tendency attack the recent trend of emphasizing the (supposed) virtues of self-management within the workplace. 'Managerial decentralization and the dissemination amongst workers of free states does not equate, despite the apparent advantages of this 'pop socialism', with anything which could seriously be termed a genuinely progressive mutation within capitalism. Alienation remains.' I use this term in the sense that is given to it in the following quotation from Alain Touraine:

'Alienation means cancelling out social conflict by creating dependent participation. The activities of the alienated man make no sense unless they are seen as the counterpart to the interests of those who alienate him. Offering the workers, for example, participation in the organization of an industry without their having authority over its economic decisions leads to alienation. Ours is a society of alienation, not because it reduces people to misery or because it imposes police restriction, but because it seduces, manipulates, and enforces conformity. (11)

Thus capitalism is a 'liberal' affair but this liberalism is a particular modus operandi, one which, beneath the flag of a free market ideology obscures, confuses and frustrates genuine differences, rigorous particularities, intense desires. Mass culture gives a forced unity to the dissolution and flux of 'society' by keeping the boundaries in check: 'Mass culture is a machine for showing desire: here is what must interest you, it says...' (12) Touraine is correct to stress the alienating effects of post-industrial culture. Whichever way one turns one encounters the same dull logic of the commodity, the same crude (but successful) recuperation of the unorthodox, the same dehumanizing ideal. What we encounter today is the extermination of all activities and interests which are outside the margins of profit. That which cannot be inscribed with a price and which therefore refuses to become part of the specter of the age of exchange is summarily erased. Precisely at the point where the state of technology makes possible a widespread release from the workplace without a fall in productivity as an inevitable result there appears the ideology of worker as petty capitalist. This worker longer has time to be concerned with leisure (which is in any case the institutionalized form of 'free' time within capitalism); rather he or she feels forced to devote themselves, bracketing their resistance, to their job, since their new position of pseudo-power gives them the impression that they are working for themselves, that the profit lost or gained are - as The Pleasure Tendency explain - 'their own, and not the bosses', pleasure or regret.

In contradistinction to the confusion over who is working for whom, and for what, it would appear - at first sight at any rate - that artists would occupy a clearly defined position or standpoint. Artists produce for themselves, that is, for nothing. Wealthy members of society accumulate works of art as signifiers of their overabundant bank accounts. That's one function of art in this mediocre culture, a signal, certainly taxonomic, of the Wealth of Wealth. But another and more important rank of art is its critical function. To surmise art with the job of criticism is to suggest that the meanings and values in circulation are of a fairly limited nature, that they are biased, and that they thereby do a 'political' job. These meanings are presented, as I have suggested above, throughout a mass media but they are perhaps most apparent within the imagery of advertising.

Despite its current sophistication advertising, via a 'stolen' and insipid surrealism which may give an impression of novelty and refinement, presents the viewer with the most banal of meanings, the most 'shabby' of jokes (which of course 'everyone' manages to 'get'), and with a taste for 'the good things in life', for a lifestyle and personality which has as its main attribute the fact that it can be purchased. To be happy, one is led to believe, is to be in tune with fashion, to receive and retransmit the most contemporary of signals. Certain writers promote the idea that it is possible to be at one and the same moment both critical of...
advertising and a good consumer. Along with some currents of so-called postmodern art advertising is offered to the 'feminist' (1) audience of Women's Review as some kind of radical tool or philosophical prop which justifies the stream of novelties, 'proves' the authenticity of fashion:

'If we are to learn anything theoretically from the debates on post-modernism, or practically from what image-makers are now doing, it is that the old has to give way to the new repeatedly - that we must use the past to make and unmake the present.' (13)

Suzanne Moore thus puts capitalism's naturalisation of novelty on the back so thoroughly it was really had stopped, had frozen in a manner which enabled the subject to cut out and keep any particular set of juxtapositions (of cultural styles, clothes, mannerisms, values) he or she liked. The forced turnover of advertising, films, art - somehow becomes the way things are, not the way things are made to appear. Advertising is here depicted as some kind of social service which lets it be known that the changes are forced to concern oneself with are inevitable, and in any case only the ground for a liberal, cheerful combination of signs. No need for social transformation because we can all make our own meanings: 'there is real pleasure to be had in upsetting what's going on, in being fooled and surprised.' (14)

There is a great amount of chatter about how everyone knows that the trick is a trick. 'That one can spot the intellectual references within advertising is not to suggest that the mechanisms of capitalist idiosemantics, the devices of alienation, have become any more transparent or (thereby, perhaps) any less oppressive. Capitalism is aggressive in the way it imposes, despite a purist liberalism, the range of values on offer. Advertisements have to be slick and simple in their implications because with the identification of commodification the aim is to index (very) young people to dedicated consumption, to destroy any chance that they might find the goods on offer - and what they have to do to get them - not quite to their taste. It was already apparent to Adorno and Horkheimer, etc. forty years ago that 'The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them.' (15) The task of art then, insofar as it has not already been totally caught up in the myth of a natural and inevitable transformation of the market, is to emphasise not the more transparent side of Baudelaire's equation but, rather, the permanence and relative coherence over time of concerns which cannot be edited into mere financial profit, 'equivalence.' In one sense this is only to suggest that artists should emphasise their idiosyncrasies and indulgences, refine (and not repudiate) activities carried out for their own sake. Now that art is becoming but one more aspect of the culture industry, a spectacle carefully diluted in galleries and 'popular exhibitions whose theme is an alleged return to the quiet and exoteric 'professionalism' of the hand-in-the-clouds painter or sculptor, a move away from the politicisation of the 1960s (16), it is important that artists disturb - in many different ways - the complacency of ready-made meanings. Art should become once again something not entertaining but suspect. If I may quote Barthes once more: 'The artist', he tells us in his essay 'Unsociable Man',...

"is... threatened, not only by established power... but also by the collective and always latent opinion that a society can get on very well without art: the artist's activity is suspect because it disturbs the comfort, the security of stable meanings, because it is at once extravagant and gratuitous, and because the new society, in search of itself by many different systems, has not yet decided what it should think, what it will think of luxury. (17) In the face of a society perpetually by stereotypes this is a call for vigilance.

Peter Sacklin

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes, 1975/1977, p. 83 (Dates refer to original publication and, where relevant, the translation. Page numbers are for the latter).
4. I use the masculine to follow Benjamin's usage. This 'slant' isn't followed below.
6. 'Central Park', included in New German Critique, No. 34, Winter 1985, p. 46.
7. See his Fragments of Modernity, 1985, p. 372.
9. Cf. Eugenio Montale: '...ideas have become a form of commodity; one puts them on and takes them off at the first change of fashion.' Poet in Our Time, 1972/1976, p. 36.
14. Ibid.
16. I.e. with 'conceptual art'.
17. 'Caro Antonioin...' in Art and Text, No. 17, 1985, p. 46.
The Third Assault

A Note Concerning the Contemporary Conditions for the Practice of Critique

A contemporary critical practice which aspires to raise the issue of social transformation necessarily has to be continuously inserted into the present concrete historical context. This definition of this context includes a recognition of the shifts and changes which constitute the relation of the present to the past. Failure to acknowledge such movement constrains the theoretical work to status quo positions, thus, thereby perfecting pernicious of the revolutionary classical tradition, broadening the meaning of the Winter/Westminster Group, and also the tendency to substitute its polemics with the rhetoric of Thatcherism, whilst the diverse sumptuousness of anti-racism, feminism, participatory systems of administration, become rhetoric of socialicty.

Second, the theoretical perspectives of the Second Assault. This shift has two aspects. First, the overall trajectory of the earlier Assaults has been that there is no longer an obligation to accept any conventional hierarchy of stasis embedded in received opinion as a relative truth of various theoretical advances achieved within their development. Thus, within the First Assault, for present purposes, Foucault may come to stand more central than, say, Heidegger. Similarly, a reassessment of the Second Assault may find a contemporary relevance in Arndt than in Sartre. The Second Assault begins with the final abort of hopes for European revolution on the 'classic' model of the Post-World War I years. The founding statements of the distinctive approach appear in 1933-4: Lukacs' Marxism, the Prehistory of the Concept of Socialism, and Korsch's Marxism, the Situation of the Intellectual. They set the stage for the theoretical work of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin, Brecht, Lefebvre, Castoriadis, Lefort, and ultimately the Situationist International. The social practice of this movement is manifest in its second phase as the 'New Left', the French occupations movement, the Italian Autonomism in problematic relation to the theory.

What is inadequately recognized in this, as well as suffered, in the last 20 years, a domestic as well as that suffered by the First Assault. This lack of awareness is regarded not only by recognizing that there have been 'setbacks' since the late 1960s, which are widespread, but rather in the fact that older models of struggle continue to form the core of such anti-capitalist activities as persists. A true recognition of the contours of that defeat is the pre-condition for the launch of a Third Assault. The thought of the possibility of a Third Assault is the pre-condition for the development of revolutionary critique and practice here and now. Part of the true recognition resides in absorbing the fact that the Third Assault stands in relation to the Second Assault as the Second Assault stood to the First Assault. Two consequences follow:

The new initiative inherits the terrain left by the defeat of the previous movement. So, the Second Assault developed in the context of the emergence of parliamentary parties of the working class, and of welfare state economies, themselves predicated upon working class passivity, itself the consequence of the defeat of the First Assault. Thence, the Third Assault must develop a context of the authoritarian appropriation of certain themes of the Second Assault, consequent upon the failure of the latter to successfully impose its perspectives on its terms. So, anti-racism becomes rhetoric of Thatcherism, whilst the diverse sumptuousness of anti-racism, feminism, participatory systems of administration, become rhetoric of socialicty.

Second, the theoretical perspectives open for new shifts. This shift has two aspects. First, the overall trajectory of the earlier Assaults has been that there is no longer an obligation to accept any conventional hierarchy of stasis embedded in received opinion as a relative truth of various theoretical advances achieved within their development. Thus, within the First Assault, for present purposes, Foucault may come to stand more central than, say, Heidegger. Similarly, a reassessment of the Second Assault may find a contemporary relevance in Arndt than in Sartre. The other aspect that opens up is the need to move beyond the assumptions generated by the previous perspective. To the First Assault, figures like Marcuse, Weber were primarily significant in that they contributed to the Second Assault their insights into, or already shared in, were incorporated into the new perspectives. Similarly, in the Second Assault, in its guise as 'experiential Marxism', the prime theoretical enemy was structuralism. Now, the Third Assault it seems likely that work developed from this period of the New Left - the work of Foucault, Derrida, then, the later work of Baudrillard, Deleuze, Lyotard, with a host of great contemporaries.

The major shift to restore a Third Assault perspective is accepted in simple repression, the explicit recognition of the decline of the Second Assault making a paradigmatic return to the First Assault rather than the development of the new Third Assault. A prime example would be Anderson's critique of 'Western Marxism', which concludes with a revolutionary for a renaissance. The acceptance of the Third Assault perspective necessitates as a priority an engagement with the reading 'from the outside', an external analysis, of the work of the Second Assault. It is noteworthy that Korsch and Lukacs' 1933 landmark were readings of the First Assault. The other need is analysis of the oppositions which fall outside and against the Second Assault, for example, in a different fashion in terms of the Third Assault by way of a practice which replaces the notion of the usefulness of a sharp distinction here.

Scopes of the Third Assault perspective are already present by implication in some of the analysis put forward by Here and Now, The Pictures, Fensin, and Smile. It is to be hoped that this introduction to the ongoing work of the Third Assault, by making explicit what has to date been implicit, may contribute to the clarification of possible points of parallel development undertaken within and beyond these groups.

Gus McDonald
Third Assault
'New' Social Movements

It has become commonplace today to suggest something is wrong with Left political theory, philosophy and action; at least within theoretical parlance even if the minds and actions of 'activists' lag behind those 'abstract' considerations and debates which attend this scepticism. Given the continued reluctance on the part of the proletariat in Western capitalist societies to express any enthusiasm for its historically adapted role as harbinger of socialist revolution and thus realise its destiny as historical subject, this can hardly be surprising.

A rising out of and partly in response to this impasse in anti-capitalist thinking and action, a new kind of substitutionism has evolved in academic and political circles predicated upon an alleged terminal of decline of possibilities, dynamism and activity amongst the proletarians of Western Europe and North America. This substitutionism takes the form of an argument that the new social movements have substituted for the proletarian class as the subject of historical change. On the other hand, the new social movements, from Solidarity, 'Citizens' Movements' and Third World Squatters' movements to the Peace Movement, the Green, and the Women's Movement, are seen as fundamentally different from the old Labour and Workers' Movements in that they are not imbued with a historically necessary destiny, neither are they seen as necessarily representative of the population, structure and nature. Indeed it is argued that they break with traditional group-formation in the precise sense that individuals gravitate towards them in ever-shifting alliances and identities rather than being 'members' within a hierarchically structured organization with the constitution of cadres, representatives and party; the participants 'find' the movement rather than the movement seeking out its 'members' and potential members. These social movements, then, are no longer expressions of group or sectional 'interest'.

My strategy in examining the new social movements is not to reiterate academic analysis with its endless typologies, 'structural formulae' and descriptive contrasts between the old and the new political movements, but to circumvent this type of approach (despite its many insights) by instead looking at actual experiences of individuals and groups in strategically important areas of extensively and intensively commodified society, and how these experiences have connected to 'political action'. By 'strategically important areas' I mean sites of contention, conflict and struggle in and around processes of commodification: sites situated social relations where commodity relations or the 'invasion of exchange' have consolidated, been strengthened or weakened and power-relations which accrue at these sites are made explicit and are experienced and recognized by the actors in the situation. My purpose in pursuing this strategy is to discover if any judgement can be made about conflict potentials in advanced capitalist societies, specifically whether we can detect sustained anti-capitalist values and dispositions within the new protest movements (feminism, black struggles, environmental, democratic and other 'new' social movements) and what are the likely outcomes for this type of opposition. Finally, what does an examination of new social movements tell us about the nature of 'political action' in advanced 'post-industrial' capitalism?

Much of the academic analysis suggests the new types of conflict and potential for conflict expressed in social movements arise through a more or less direct confrontation between 'civil society' and 'the state' with traditionally 'economic' (class) struggles playing a subordinate or marginal role. Conflicts and disparities between sectors and social groups emerge on the terrain of the state itself - they cannot be deduced from the relation to the means of production of the relevant actors.

Examples of what this means are the predominance of social rather than economic demands amongst public sector workers such as nurses who have fought for the preservation and coherence of ways of life, community, solidarity and 'use-value' of energy production (sustaining so-called 'uneconomic' pits). Or, teachers who have a primary concern with the conditions, purposes and quality of the education system. Again, the welfare-state salariat of social and community workers, welfare rights workers, health workers, and bureaucratic workers in general themselves-employed by local states or central government engage in struggle to affect or change the policies and purposes of state bureaucracies. Teachers, health workers, civil servants, and miners' strikes and actions fall within this category as do local policy initiatives around 'equal opportunities', 'race relations', 'multi-cultureism', 'anti-racism', 'anti-sexism', and municipal socialist initiatives generally, in which the GLC, Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool figure prominently. Furthermore, these bureaucratic and anti-bureaucratic forms are themselves but the institutionalized expression of wider issues evoked by the new social movements of feminism, black identity and opportunity, gay rights, the peace movement, etc.
At this point, for the sake of clarity, I think it is crucial to distinguish between bureaucratic expressions and forms—i.e., the positions occupied within local and national state institutions, associations, etc., by individuals who 'represent' some of the concerns expressed by social movements, and, on the other hand, the constitutions of the social movements themselves. That is, between a 'NEW PARASITOCRACY' of Women's and Race Officers, Welfare and Community Workers and the like and their 'DEPENDENT' populations in urban ghettos, schools, universities, prisons, the welfare system, local authorities, hospitals, etc., and the corollary of this distinction in Public Sector industries (the one hand, the paralysing of union leaders like Scargill and the movement of mostly young miners on the other in the 1984 Miners Strike). To say that representation of demands by welfare advice workers, women by women's rights officers, black by race officers, gay by equal opportunities officers, working class housing estates by community workers, etc., is a form of bureaucratic recuperation is to state the obvious. However, the theoretical analysis suggests much more than this; it wants to deduce a critical theory of the dynamics of welfare-bureaucratization from an analysis of new political conflicts as expressed in new social movements. Ultimately it seeks to develop a 'new' critique of commodity relations and 'find' an evidential basis for this theory among the disparate allegedly anti-capitalist values and dispositions found in new social movements. It is to this problem I now want to address my remarks.

Generally, academic analysis wants to argue there is no necessary correspondence between the economy and the political system, and by virtue of this there is a non-correspondence between economic/distributional conflicts and the constitution of the social identities of social movements and their collective actors. A basic consequence of this 'post-marxist' axiom for understanding the formation of social movements is that 'militant conflicts', i.e., those which articulate non-integrable and non-reducible demands, are most likely to occur amongst 'residual' sectors of the population. These sectors are precisely those which exhibit most distance from the wage-labour/capital relation and are characterized by their degree of 'de-commodification', that is, where income and living conditions are determined directly by bureaucratic-political means. Therefore, those sectors where 'politically' determined prices, incomes and conditions dominate: educational, welfare, health and administrative rewarding, wages and pensions—generate conflicts which are explained on the basis that such bureaucratic-administrative forms represent the most advanced forms of erosion of the commodity form within capitalist exchange relations. Because in these sectors the bureaucratic mode organized around demands for use-values is de facto pitted against the capitalist free-market mode organized around exchange-values, then somehow conflicts in these areas trigger and focus a type of political struggle orientated towards overcoming the commodity form in demands for use-values.

The trouble with this analysis is that a cursory glance at the Thatcherite project of the 1980s supplies powerful evidence for the thesis—a project which has set out explicitly to 'reconstruct' all sectors of society, does indeed support such predictions and prognostications because sectional struggles have increasingly revolved around privatization and attempts at 're-commodification'. Capitalist state intervention has had the unintended consequence of creating spheres of potential decommodification where exchange relationships and values are undermined, 'taken out' of 'neutralized' market determination of price and value and made visible and culpable as state-political (rather than market) measures. Teachers, social workers, housing bureaucrats do enter into qualitatively different social relations with school-children, the poor, and tenants, than their opposite numbers in market-oriented sectors. Similarly, school children and their parents, tenants, welfare recipients, the unemployed experience these services as 'citizen' rights undermined by market eligibility. The Thacherite project, predicted as it is on the state's fiscal crisis—the claim that the state is no longer able to balance its books without a massive increase in wealth production to sustain public expenditure—is an attempt to re-socialize society towards a market mode, thus letting the state 'off the hook' of ever-rising (and 'un-affordable') expectations and costs. On this basis, then, the evidence appears to support the N.S.M. theorists.

However, this type of analysis which purports to be 'post-marxist' ends up, I would argue, firmly within Left-Labour/Social-Democratic assumptions and frameworks, on the one hand, or 'Identity-Exclusion' politics on the other, depending on which side of the dividing line: PARASITOCRACY or SOCIAL MOVEMENT/ the theory rationalizes.

The Left-Labour/Social-Democratic consequences of the theory refuse to acknowledge the relationship between social movements and their recuperation through strategies of crisis-management. Thus, the 'expressive culture' of British Black struggle becomes rearticulated into 'positions' for black managers of culture' engaged in a range of activities from 'race' awareness training to media hype. This relationship suggests the new Social Movements are a conveyor belt for a new parasitocracy.

On the other hand, those consequences of the theory I have identified as 'Identity-Exclusion' Politics amount to an endorsement of collective identities attached to 'naturalistic' and generic categories of age, sex, race, region and nation. Here a politics is generated based solely on whichever 'halal' or one's...
identity seems to offer most strategical advance. One's 'womanness' or 'blackness' or 'gayness' becomes the basis of political self-identification and identity. Solidly by virtue of 'being' a woman, black, gay, 'belonging to' a particular region, place or nation, it assimilates itself's guarantees through this particular social experience a universal, panoptical vision of the nature of commodity society, or at least offers a 'knowing-about' social injustice. 'Natural' identity becomes the basis of social movement political identity and struggles groups make mutually competing claims for the generic status of their own category: 'women', 'black', 'gay' become synonymous with universal knowledge/experience. Whichever variable of self-identification is chosen all other variables are excluded in these attempts to corner the market in oppression. Without going into the taxonomical nature of this kind of politics, it suffices to say that the statement 'I'm oppressed' carries with it no necessary vision beyond fragmented, parochial and defensive concerns.

These 'political' orientations associated with the new social movements are two sides of the same coin; Left-Labour/Social Democratic and Exclusion-Identity Politics are both options within a framework of state interventionism from rationalized interests of conservation and preservation to fully-fledged social movements, have interacted with central and local state interventions to form contestations defined in terms of non-political cultural 'values' and collective 'identities' attached to pre-political 'naturalistic' genre categories of age, sex, race and territory/community. No doubt this has occurred because state interventionism has increasingly made 'nature' and 'human nature' itself an object of state policy. This can be seen in vastly increased spheres of management, laundering, manipulation, and surveillance of both physical and mental/cultural programmes and human resources, including the psychic aspects of the latter (from Y.T.S. through to 'therapy'). But again the type of analysis on offer to explain these dynamics - that state intervention into areas of social life previously left to the 'private' sphere and cultural tradition has had the unintended consequence of 'dennaturalising' and politicising such spheres - is flawed: the personal is not political, certainly not in the unmediated, direct relationship between private life and politics evolved by the NSM's - 'lifestyle', Black, Gay and Feminist politics will not find the sources of social injustice in the effects of commodity society, and the effects of social injustice. Cultural, sexual, religious and stylistic choices are clearly private dispositions and celebrations - they cannot be the stuff of genuinely political movements whose concerns must be social and collective organisation discursively explored within a genuine public sphere.
The disguising, ascription or categorisation of these taken-for-granted subjective orientations and dispositions need to be opposed on the basis of protecting and enhancing a private life and its orientations and diversity; ultimately this means protecting and enhancing a cultural freedom in which anyone can choose to express, make love and live in anyway they are disposed, providing these choices do not transgress social and material responsibility and morality. To 'politicise' sexual or cultural orientations merely delivers up identity to surveillance, manipulation and subjective critique of 'behaviour'.

Although NSMs are a reaction to the 'internal colonisation' of everyday life, that is a bureaucratization and commodification of life through administrative and political actions, they at the same time risk becoming co-conspirators in the very process of rationalisation they purport to oppose. The accomplishment of massive surveillance of the population which also enhances the targeting of 'suspect' or 'unreliable' sectors - youth, blacks, inner city and council estate populations, 'artists' etc. is actually helped along by virtue of the form of struggle characteristic of the NSMs. Strategies include recuperation through professionalisation processes involving welfare and social workers, youth trainers and workers, technification the police -the development of 'expert cultures' which enhance the informal communicative infrastructures of everyday life. The 'free and consent' ideology of the members of these 'expert cultures' derives from the fact that many were themselves schooled in NSM political action.

Finally, the basic problem for the NSMs is the form of struggle and nature of the demands they seek. By their very form and nature the NSMs are bound to fail politically. I have already suggested some of the reasons why: their preoccupation with subjectivist identity politics; the ease with which they succumb to Left-Labour/Social Democratic political frameworks (witness the history of the relationship between the Labour party and the Peace Movement, from outright betrayal to the absurdity of 'Nuclear-Free zones'; witness the absurdity also of Brent's presentation and implementation of 'anti-racist politics' etc.); but more important, NSM mobilisations generated around 'collective consumption': struggles (commodification of urban living and services) stay firmly within the commodity form in that where use-value is opposed to exchange-value this relies on a notion of dependence upon bureaucratic provision, still paid for, albeit 'collectively'. Discussion about 'value' itself has hardly begun. How are these administratively-provided services to be 'paid' for? What is to be 'valued'?

NSMs tend to be locally-based and territorially-defined, focusing as they do on the search for cultural identity and the defence of subjective interaction in a particular setting - e.g. 'the neighbourhood', 'the community' became both the source and the object of struggle, whether defined ethnically, sexually, or geographically. These concerns relate to a form of demand for political self-management defined as increased power for local government (sic), neighbourhood decentralisation and urban self-management. It is difficult to envisage how this subjectivism, localism and territorialism can add up to anything particularly effective other than offering opportunities for nation states to identify, monitor andassess their populations.

NSMs are signifiers of 'discontent' towards which state apparatchiks can 'choose' or 'not choose' to direct policies and resources - always symbolic, and sometimes repressive ones. Insofar as NSMs continue their overriding concern with the duration of everyday life - its locales, milieus, co-presences at the level of face-to-face interaction in communities and neighbourhoods, then their concern is solely with how power appears at the level of everyday interaction settings and organisation in particular time- and-space contexts. Insofar as participants sustain an overriding sense of being in time and space as a condition of specific political practices defined by the physical constraints and enabling of the body and the milieu in which it moves - that is, a sense of their womanness, blackness, gayness, territorial identity: insofar, then, as participants experience social and collective life solely as what is 'present' to them: insofar as these types of social construction of what constitutes authentic political practice dominate and structure the nature of the new social movements, then they will not succeed in effecting social transformation. The wider national and international forces and movements which prop up commodity society will remain unasserted.

Social Movements encourage the fragmentation and parochialism of oppositional ideas but do not offer moral imperatives with the vision and scale adequate to the problems of the contemporary world system. The vision and purpose of the old social movements were easier to this. Although today their analysis and practice are moribund they did, at least, ask utopian questions concerning the universality of social justice.

Colin Webster

Notes

Some of the academic theorising on New Social Movements can be found in:

J. Habermas 'New Social Movements' Tethos 49 1981.

A. Touraine The Voice and the Eye 1981.


K. Eder 'A New Social Movement' Tethos 52 1982.
Open Letter

The post-election dissection of voting trends has thrown up the suggestion that 1987 was a ‘watershed’ election.

1979 owed much to the mix calculation of Callaghan delaying till after the Winter of Discontent. 1983 was inflated by the ‘patriotic’ appeal of the Falklands and the non-marketable Labour Leader, Foot. 1987, it is argued, illustrated the underlying social and demographic changes hastened by ‘Popular Toryism’.

Crudely this is termed the North/South divide. This, however, can obscure different elements of the ‘Thatcherite’ strategy towards the class structure and their political expression. Only Scotland, Wales and the North-East saw appreciable uniform swings in Marginal seats. Hence such as Calder Valley, Bury or Huyburn preserved Tory members in Yorkshire and Lancashire despite small regional swings to Labour.

The much publicised redevelopment of Docklands in E. London (spreading to Liverpool and Glasgow) has had little electoral impact. Moreover the Wandsworth model is typical where a Tory Borough has artificially manipulated electoral gains in Battersea through the selling-off of Council Estates. Labour’s short fall of seats in London and the Midlands, and third party status throughout the South (excluding the major urban centres) is illustrative of a ‘New Realism’ associated with the dominance of finance, service and service sector accelerated development.

It has also been engineered in harmony with policies of home ownership, council house sales and all the Security-conscious aspects of an outlook where anything other than narrow self-interest is an aberration (such as the media fundraising of Rambi-Ald).

As a small (and not sufficiently vocal) minority we cannot hope to overturn such massive social change. We should, of course, seek to understand it, in all its complexity. What we can do is target the areas where our outlook might find a response.

“The Right to be Lazy” may yet have its day as a popular rallying cry but Government plans are proceeding fast to conscript school leavers and blue-collar the under 25’s into YTS, JTS and such like. On top of this Poll Tax, starting in Scotland, with the term Community Charge, will reinforce even greater resentment amongst the young and less advantaged.

Instead of counterposing the new realism with old realism (of Welfare-lun ‘A New Deal’ of Public Works), the space will present itself to win support, through action and communicable material for an Anti-Exchange philosophy of life. In the urban centres we should, with urgency, help articulate appeal to the disenfranchised.

In housing, land and many other areas where Tory policy is having a greater impact (often with the overt co-operation of Labour Councils), there is the scope to challenge such a philosophy amongst the great majority for whom it has no apparent relevance. In Glasgow, for instance, this means well research opposition to the Garden Festival, City of Culture, redevelopment of dockland corridor and zones for the so-called ‘Yuppies’.

A more vigorous and self-confident approach could be adopted to debates and public discussions (as will be the case in Glasgow within the forums organized by the ‘free university’ in the near future).

Such opposition, reawakening the realm of the political and public sphere, could be repeated nationwide, albeit adapted to different local circumstances. This would amount to a ‘watershed’ for those presently trapped in their armchair or cynical ‘indifference’.

J. McFarlane
Reviews

Probably because of the resonance of the 1968 movement, the waves of oppositional movement which arose in France in December 1986 - January 1987 came as a pleasant surprise to many radicals: "France is about to wake up after years of opposing sleep". We have received several pamphlets outlining the leaflet of those times.

Interrogations Sur Le Mouvement De Decembre 1986 (to price, published by L'Institut Social, B.P. 243, 75564 Paris Cedex 12) and Des Traetes en Decembre 86: A Propos des Manifestations Etudiantees a Paris (to price, published 29/1/87 by La Societe, C.P. 209, 3642 Nantes, Canada 201 6206), as their titles suggest, concentrate on the December movement, pointing against the proposed change in student status, a movement which escalated when subjected to incompetent state repression. Both pamphlets express mainly of leaflets distributed during the demonstrations, much the same material appearing in each.

For example, many of the more interesting leaflets of the student wave were produced by Les Lancers; a group of technical college students for whom grievances about university selection standards were irrelevant. France Goes Off The Rails gives some background to this and indicates tensions between "the student movement" proper and those trying to create a more generalised movement.

The pamphlet's material on the rail strike contains interesting material on the background of the dispute and the attempts to keep the strike movement free of control by union or party and to break through the sectional contempt of different groups of railway workers for one another.

The overview section in France Goes Off The Rails serve to link any "Our ideas are in everyone's minds" triumphalism which might come from contemplating a set of non-Situationist leaders. The limits of such leaflets, particularly when they float from actual involvement, are discussed. So too is the contrast between France, where independent leaflets (of which these are Les Lancers are exemplary) are the norm in any movement, and Britain, where the tradition of producing such leaflets (as in the early 1970s) has died out. Can there be a movement which doesn't explicitly produce, exchange and critique such radical theory? What then of the relative social crises in Britain and France?

Perhaps this magazine has an unhealthy fascination with periods of reflux. However, it would be interesting to know about the levels of communication after the immediate movement had died down, for example, about any interventions by Les Lancers in the rail strike of course.

"If it's the start of something, something difficult to define, it's deceptively a 'creeping' process whose consequences won't necessarily appear immediately. Time will tell...." (Interrogations Sur Le Mouvement)

Fleurs Agastes Cynicism published by the Pleasure Tendency May 1987 is very dense and cryptic but attacks a syndrome which, as the pamphlet argues, is the dominant ideology of the present day. The phenomenon of everyday cynicism and its political, psychological, and moral consequences is undoubtedly of central importance. Quoted: Thesis V. "Cynicism among revolutionaries provides for their eventual defeat. They have their excuses ready-made by blaming the system for all the unsatisfactory behaviour which cynicism makes inevitable".

SAE to: P.O. Box 159, LEEDS LS3 5AA

Other material recently received includes:

Ecoeur (in Spanish) from:
Apartado de Correos 1 363, BARCELONA

Schwartz Faden (in German) from:
Postfach 7011, GRAFENBUH, FOR

Povita 3: translated reprints of Portuguese post-Stalinist magazine. 50p from:
BM Bloch, LONDON WC1 3XX

Know your Enemy pamphlet on China by A. Revan/SPLAT. £2 from:
5 Cadbury Road, BIRMINGHAM 13

Class on War on the Home Front: on WW2 and Glasgow based anti-parliamentary communism. £2 from: Raven Press,
25 Pecadilly, MANCHESTER M1 5XX

Common Sense: academic 'do-it-yourself' theory journal. 68pp.
£2 (+ postage) from: M. McDonald,
15 Leven Terrace, EDINBURGH

Counter-Information: now up to issue 15. SAE to P.H. 81
43 Candlemaker Row, EDINBURGH

Echanges Digtale & Pankseh pamphlets from:
BM Box 31, LONDON WC1

Processed World Issue 19: Articles include analysis of Transient employment; small is not beautiful; cartoons etc. now US sub. $13 from:
41 Sutter St. 1829, SAN FRANCISCO CA 94104, USA

Written in Flames: Naming the British ruling class. Sequel to the notorious "Who Owns Leeds". 50pp. from:
Box T. 111, 1st Floor, Market Buildings,
Vicar Lane, LEEDS 1

Lobster No. 14 imminent. Investigative Research, Parapolitics. Full text available account of the Peter Wright/M 15 story in No.
11 Sub. £4 from: Robin Rantay,
17c Pearson Ave, HULL HU6 2EX

In a change from our normal practice, this issue of Here & Now has been put together by a group of collaborators in West Yorkshire. Distribution will, for the most part, remain with the Here & Now collective in the West of Scotland.

Editors: Mike Peters and Peter Suchin
THE WORKER'S MAY POLE

An offering for May Day 1894 from Walter Crane