EVERYONE THINKS THEY CAN CONTROL MONEY UNTIL IT STARTS TO CONTROL THEM

Money Screws You Up
LETTERS: RIOTS CROSSFIRE

Dear Ray,

Sorry to take so long to reply to your letter, this was due to unavoidable circumstances rather than an unwillingness on my part to reply.

Firstly, making no reference to what was written by and concerning Black people was an omission on my part. However, I doubt whether my conclusions would have been any different had I done so. I did not dismiss these "Real Events" as happening for. I do not see from reading the article. It was trying to show the obvious way Leftists in particular responded to the riots, and other issues, and as such are just an isolated fringe in British politics. Secondly, I deliberately downplayed the significance of the riots because of the way such groups try to justify their own imagined significance out of other people's actions.

I disagree with you on the nature of the riots, they were not uprisings because of their confinement, and the lack of support they got from the rest of society. As such the riots only can be seen as riots whose significance in creating real change for those involved and the rest of us is minimal. If such a political consciousness as one would expect in an uprising, then why didn't these riots happen during the miners' strike? No doubt the oppressive attitude of the police was just as obvious or was it? And the setting up of a "Second Front" in the form of riots would have been more effective for all concerned when the police were at their most stretched.

As for me not having a Black Perspective in my article, firstly this was an article on a specific topic, namely the representation of the riots rather than their reasons for being. Secondly, I am very dubious on this whole question of identity in politics, e.g., Black identities, women/feminist identity, etc. Surely, this form of separation in politics is just reproducing the divisions imposed on us by capitalism? What is being created is a negative reaction which reinforces those divisions and thus capital rather than create a strong and more effective form of opposition.

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the Invasion of Exchange

"The last stage of the labouring society, the society of job-holders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had actually been submerged in the overall life process of the species and the only active decision still required of the individual was to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality, the still individually- sensed pain and trouble of living, and acquiesce in a dazed, "tranquilised", functional type of behaviour. The trouble with modern theories of behaviourism is not that they are wrong, but that they could become true, that they actually are the best conceptualisation of certain obvious trends in modern society. It is quite conceivable that the modern age, which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity, may end in the dull, inert, most sterile passivity history has ever known."

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 1958

With labour late to jump on the bandwagon, it now appears that a new consensus on economic policy is emerging between the three major parties. The publication of the ideas of "Social Ownership" and "Share Ownership" by the Labour Party has meant that they can keep in step with the Long March to the property-owning "paradise" which the Conservative and Alliance parties have already begun. Although the means employed by the various parties differ, the end is the same: the establishment of an economy where wealth and power, with their concomitant "values and responsibilities" are apperently, or in reality, devoted to the ordinary individual... in other words, a further democratisation of the commodity economy.

Since at least the passing of the 1976 Finance Act by the Callaghan Government under Liberal pressure, the British State has encouraged the development of employee share ownership, and its further measures have served to reinforce a process already initiated by the companies themselves. This amounts to a policy of managerial decentralisation and worker participation in production. The kind of initiatives involved include the donation of free shares to employees. British Telecom, National Freight, British Aerospace, Cable & Wireless and British Leyland are only some of the companies to have done so in 1985. Other companies such as Victorics actively encourage their workers to attend Annual General Meetings, while even the National Health Service is floating the idea of decentralised budgeting, where the staff become responsible for balancing the books, along with their more health-oriented duties.

Another measure much favoured by the present Government is the encouragement of entrepreneurship. (The LDA entrepreneur is this country represent the highest number since 1921) "Entrepreneurialism", the fragmentation of small branches of large corporations to local executives, thereby giving these financial as well as managerial responsibility, is another measure much favoured by current business theorists. And not to be outdone by right-wing capitalism, its left-wing has done much to pull up the image of Worker Cooperative (see, for example, the work of the Industrial Commons Ownership Movement). More radical ideas are floated by the Other Economic Summit. In particular it urges the formation of community currencies: money which will be controlled by a local authority to ensure that wealth remains within the locality. (This has been modelled on an experiment in Vancouver.)

Such ideas reverberate throughout the political spectrum. In an article in The Times (Dec. 1994), Robin Cook MP (Labour) observed that a bookmaker's shop near Glasgow "crowns off from the community into the balance-sheet of its national chain a plump sum, estimated locally at £26,000 per year. Why not a community-owned bookmaker's, so that at least the money was returned to the community through investment in jobs and support for local services?" Such is the common-sense of the day, and it requires understanding, if only to warn those who may be seduced by this Capitalism with a human face.

What unites all these ideas and measures is an anti-bureaucratic spirit and a desire to further involve the individual in the business of production by drawing upon that age-old savour of capitalism, the fact that it is driven by the aspirations of the many and not the dictaten of the few.

However, the responsibility for these developments lies as much in the practical critique of work which emerged amongst all classes in the 60s and 70s as it does in discontent with bureaucracy. By forging the link between performance and pay or, in the case of the disaffected manager, requiring him to be personally liable for the profitability of his department, paperwork and inefficiency is reduced. More importantly though, the individual is placed in a position where the winds of the market blow directly down his own neck. Thus, instead of regarding rationalisation and speed-ups as imposed on him by managerial whim, the individual employee is made to see all-too-clearly how, if he does not "perform", the company will lose to the competition and with it go his job and his share of the profits. If in the seventies managers were prepared to listen to ways of "humanising" the job, in the eighties they are quite prepared to put their employees in the managerial hot-seat in order to convince them just how economically necessary it is that the job be rotten, boring, and inhuman. The old Trotskyist Transitional Demand opens the books looks pretty futile in these circumstances.

If it was just a matter of labour discipline the new approach would be bad enough, but lurking beneath these economic measures lies a more tautious intent. Speaking in the Commons on share ownership (in
Dec. 1981) Nicholas Ridley (now Environment Minister) said: "we have to consider two principles. One is that employees should be able to participate in the profits of the company in which they work, that they should own a stake in their company, and that they should be motivated to try harder on behalf of the financial interests of the share that they own. The other, which is an equally laudable but separate proposition, is that the more widely share ownership can be spread throughout the community, the more individual investors there are in the Stock Market, the better it will be for general political reasons."

Exactly what these general political reasons may be can perhaps be shown in a Guardian review of the book "Shared Ownership" by Copeland, e.g.: "...failure of business to share capital growth with employees discredits the free market system and, therefore, leads to an unhealthy concentration of ownership and decision-taking. Thus a weakness in capitalism is found to be also a potential weakness in democracy..." But, they claim, shared ownership will actually strengthen capitalism by spreading rewards, power and responsibility and provide ideological common ground between East and West."

The authors might just as easily have said "provide ideological common ground between Left and Right": for what is being considered here is a broad new refurnishment of capitalism. This de-centralising approach means to offer to the commodity system a human scale which has been so badly lacking in the vast enterprises and conglomerates of modern society. It is not easy to answer many of the criticisms of capitalism which the old socialists levelled at it; that it was uncaring and remote, that they were terrorist about like cattle, that they never cared for the fruits of their labour nor got a look-in on the profits, that the people were condemned to obey and not participate, that they were exiled from power. Such criticisms seem to fade in the face of the new ideal which questions the very descriptive term 'capitalism' as the spectre of a free-market socialism drifts into view.

Now, as we all know by now, the menu is not the meal, and the reality of the dishes served up by the up-graded management is unlikely to match the superlatives of its advertisement, and 1, for one, doubt just how much power is going to devolve onto the individual employee or, for that matter, how much overall bureaucracy will disappear as the judicial apparatus replaces the administrative, but the degree of involvement of the individual in the web of commodity relations is unprecedented, and leads directly to new forms of discontent which demand fresh approaches from those who consider themselves on the side of human happiness.

A document which describes a proposal from the forefront of the popular capitalist approach has been published by the Suriname Toyota Internation Centre "Endpoint Economics and Related Disciplines" called 'Service Credits: A New Currency for the Welfare State'. It discusses what purports to be a solution to the problem of the increase in Welfare recipients by examining a currency based on hours spent in the service of others recently set up in some American towns.

The basic approach is simple: "We can begin to address our social problems by creating a new medium of exchange that can convert presently unutilised personal time into a marketable asset that can generate real purchasing power." Each hour spent in the service of another (usually one suffering from a disability or disadvantage) entitles you to a service credit which guarantees an hour of equivalent "service" in the future. This innovation of a new currency is, like Grameen's attempt to do the same, a kind of local feyssianism and fraught with the same problems of inflation and "currency confidence" - but the internal failings of this scheme need not concern us here. What is of interest is that this "free start" for exchange in a parallel of the wider project to make the individual the centre of profit in contemporary society, and the assault on our humanity which can be perceived in this particular scheme has the same source as the new forms of discontent engendered in the wider economic sphere.

For neither system, be it the Service Credit system or "Free Market Socialism", will work where the individual does not think economically. Whereas human activity has always had a "free" side, in that unreciprocated favours abound, co-operation exists, and jobs are done for the love of them, the further devolution of monetary responsibility upon the individual sequencethese qualities out of life. Just as in the Service Credit system the individual is made to see his activity in terms of hours equivalent, so the new capitalist worker must measure his activity to what is affordable and "competitive". No "spontaneous living" can exist in this environment. The individual must always see an equivalent return from what he does. Acts and services, which in reality have their own idiosyncratic value, must be reduced to a common value, enabling exchange to take place while underlining the human appreciation of their own uniqueness. Whether the system is determined by the Exchange Value of the Free Market or the Labour Value of the Service Credit, each individual must turn accountant, calculating the value of their actions to an all-pervading, but totally-arbitrary measurement, that of abstract value, that age-old comb-trick based on the lie that human actions have direct equivalents. The fact that this has been with us for a long time does not rule out the particular dangers of the new development, as the economic sphere, which was once an activity with its own restricted place in human affairs, comes to dominate and determine all human living.

Just as the service-giver tucks up the hours he has spent visiting the old-age pensioner next door to see whether he can afford to "give" any more time, so the Capitalist Worker will have to enter each action in the balance-sheet in his mind. Why talk to a friend at work when money could be lost? And it won't be money stolen from you by the boss, but money lost by your own "insufficiency" in the new battleground of the war of all against all, where each individual becomes a company pursuing profit sustained only by a tenuous legal bureaucracy. Such in the nightmare reality of the popular capitalist dream.

What are being sacrificed on the altar of individual property-ownership are all those relations between people which are based on the uniqueness of individual desire, the unpredictability of human beings, and the existence of values higher than the mean.

Page 3
The DEMISE of the CLASS OBJECT

A survey of recent pamphlets on the agency of change and the scope for revolutionary organisation.

To speak for, and claim the following of the 'moral majority' has become the ideological goal of the 'New Right'. This is being contested by a repackaged democratic socialism, with Kinnock asserting that the ground has shifted towards greater social responsibility, and that public perception of symbolic protests ever armaments, jobs and the environment has ceased to be a liability post Rand-AF.

Devloping a strand of neo-capitalist and post-situationist concern for placing values at the centre of the radical project

The Pleasure Tendency have sensed a contemporary relevance for questions deemed secondary to the Left. Starting from a shaky beginning with their 'preliminary thesis', two pamphlets, leading on Stonehaven and strikes, articles in this magazine have demonstrated an improved blend of heresy, originality and the willingness to experiment with forms of communication. They have therefore departed from being the 'conscience of the left' (as 'Solidarity' and certain anarchists were in the past) in seeking to identify a new constituency which question the values of consumer society and who adhere to a morality that is open to radical expression & collective projects.

As articulated in THE RETURN OF THE MORAL SUBJECT[1], such a pre-occupation, while timely, is not opportunistic. It stems from a philosophical basis that stresses that: 'Man has the unique capability of being able to form an idea of what does not exist, and the responsibility of being able to choose to create it' [p.11]. Inextricably interwoven is that: 'the guilt we feel is our salvation, the guilt which makes us question; the guilt which prepares the way towards a new society, in which we shall build our existences' [p.14].

Determinist theories are the tools of our oppressors and are the product of 19th century rationality whereby we are legitimated as engineers of the diabolus of the massed.

Being less concerned with the fate of Marxism, than its legacy for humanity, it follows that a clear demarcation is drawn in the following pamphlet groups and the consciousness of radical potential. The letters ofScientious Socialism lead to a belief that their theory can discern an authentic proletarian response which can be manipulated and that whatever efforts to reform is permissible, in matter many, the siren call of a new society must be answered by the workers to get them off the march' [p.16]. Hence we have the ritual of making economic demands, invoicing strikes and regimenting their way to perpetuate an awareness of class interest. This pursuit of material self-interest aggregated to a class objective is contrasted with a transcendent impulse comes to rely increasingly on any impact of revolutionary organisation. Faced with a diffuse society where class position is separated from the experience of alienation, those that adopt 'voluntarist methods' [p.19] should an enormous task of creating imaginative and effective means of radical communication.

Before embarking such a challenge, and the practicalities that "a reduction to common terms" [p.11] involves in this new style of propagandising, we must subject such a "return" to self-confident utopianism to closer scrutiny.

The first flaw that springs to mind is that by flowing from a philosophical basis there is a lack of historical and cultural comparison. Granted, history is strained with the import of precedences, which as Marx expressed it "like a nightmare on the brain of the living". But they do not make it use as they please: they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered. Given and transmitted from the past" (8th Brumaire). Just how 'given' also varies enormously depending on an accident of birth and corresponding location. With an internationalist perspective it is possible to appreciate precisely the constraints that humanity experiences to different degrees. The attraction of 'free will being exercised therefore more closely corresponds with assumptions, which, if not exactly ethnocentric, then at least correspond with the peculiar characteristics of western, 'developed' societies... In these societies the economic infrastructure produces repeated changes of structure and serves many of the traditional influences including the religious
The question of revolutionary organisation, for a third qualification which is formed in reference to the analysis of major periods of upheaval and unrest, TEN YEARS OF HISTORY is a pamphlet in a series by a pest stintionist author, Francis Martin [4]. He explores mass struggles in France, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland and assesses the legacy against the capacity of the ruling class to reverse the tendency of their rate of control over society to decline [p.24]. Being an example of one of the few attempts in this current rift to have been drawn into the workings of the system as willing agents at recuperation, there is a tone of bitterness and pessimism under-standable in present French conditions. Fear of unemployment and the institutionalisation of labour turnover is seen as effectively neutralising the formerly destabilising influences of young disillusioned workers. Yet Europe remains the arena where "the most modern forms of confrontation have always had their being", and where the "restoration of alienation involves the suppression of "the memory of a proletariat project of a classless society and the memory of individual emancipation formulated by modern art" by 'neutralising and recuperating" [p.23]. For Martin, the survey of recent mass struggles should not be viewed by the celebration of the spontaneist or the disguise of the armchair critic. "The view that 'unbribed' autonomy and total liberty would take care of everything" demonstrated a failure "to think strategically" which accompanied an abstract identification with the 'proletariat' resulting in the loss of "intelligence of what it had done and what it could do" [p.23]. There are strains of a Maoist conception of a contest for the seizing of initiative between an 'international revolutionary current' and the system's champions, in which victory 'will come to whomever is the first to inform themselves on the state of their enemy" [p.33]. There is therefore a renewed advocacy of the 'horizontal' party which can restore a "factual truth" and organise into outposts of moments of enquiry in order to continually assess the 'balance of forces' and engage in communication which seeks to 'transmit' the significant conclusions to social struggles. Setting aside the practical questions of how best this might be achieved[5], here is a conception which defines the reason for the existence of a revolutionary minority beyond individual 'conversion' to a consciousness of "what might be". Incidentally, it is somewhat curious that all consciousness is viewed in relativistic terms since the profound awareness associated with the P.T. position is of a different [qualitative] kind to that of a 'lumpen' consciousness which descends to the level of stealing from your neigh-bours and being mercenary in dealings with others.

Letters Cont. from p.2

The reference you make to me saying that riots [can be] 'without particular aim' was, as the article suggests, a comment made about some riots rather than specifically those that occurred last year in Britain.

Are we to support all riots as uprisings? Such as those by Right wing and Fascist students in Paris 18 months or so ago? Or the riot in the Heyesl Stadium as an expression aimed at the heart of Capitalist Ideology? Obviously not, then why suggest that riots where Blacks are concerned are uprisings just because a few police get their heads passed in, despite the support campaigns which have been formed to defend the communities and those arrested and the justifiable grievances of those involved in these particular riots.
Animal Liberation

a loss of clarity

"What is at work here is a transposition of the disadvantages of life under Capital onto allegedly suffering animals instead of onto human individuals."

Thus concludes Abe's article Animal Liberation in BN no. 3; a statement many would feel inclined to agree with. However, as someone closely involved in the Animal Liberation movement of 4 or 5 years ago, the question which this statement provokes is: Is this a misplacement concern the inevitable consequences of the desires of animal liberationists or has there been a transmogrification of clarity and persistence in the actions of the liberationists themselves?

Abe identifies the ethical system underlying animal liberation as one which suggests that people can only be free if all animals are free. This, or was, largely incorrect. The phrase Animal Liberation was originally coined by the philosopher Peter Singer, whose argument, briefly, ran something like this:

"Human beings have the capability to imagine ourselves to be in the position of someone else. This capability and the resultant empathy we feel for others is at the root of all human ethics and (as Aristotle believed) expresses itself in the "Golden Rule": Do unto others as you would be done unto. Or, perhaps more relevantly, Billie's formulation of the same rule: Do not do unto others that which you would not have done unto yourself.

This idea underlies all sympathy with the oppressed, all idea of equality, all demands for social justice. When applying this rule to issues involving cruelty, Singer argued, we should do so on the point of identification which is logically relevant; that is not the capability of the victim to rationalise, but rather the capability of the victim to suffer. If rationalisation or higher thought processes were held to be the most important factor determining empathy with another, then logically we would afford previous little rights over cruelty to new-born babies who have, perhaps, less in common with us as regards intelligence than do, say, pigs or dolphins. If it can be argued that babies have at least the potential to grow into fully cognizant sensitive beings like ourselves, then why, asks Singer, do we afford the right of freedom from experimentation to severely mentally handicapped individuals who have little hope of developing the elaborate mental processes by which we identify ourselves?

To describe the illogically preferential rights we do ascribe to members of our own species, Singer coined the ugly and unfortunately little-used neologism speciesism. Rights of freedom from cruelty, Singer argued, can only be based logically on the empathy we feel with the capability to suffer that we imagine a given organism to have. In other words, he exhorts us to ask the question: "If I were such-and-such an animal, with the central nervous system that I suppose such-and-such an animal to have, would I like that done to me?" Thus the "freedom" of animal liberation is not an abstract, political freedom, not a freedom of rights and corresponding duties, not freedom of speech, thought and assembly, but simple freedom from imposed suffering. And whereas most notions of rights involve corresponding notions of duties, since we afford those particular rights by virtue of the empathy we feel and, as far as we know, animals are incapable of empathy, we do not expect similar behavior from animals towards their fellow or ourselves. Thus the "nature red in tooth and claw" argument used by some to oppose the notion of animal rights as unnatural is not strictly relevant.

The above was, at any rate, my understanding of the philosophy behind animal liberation which led to my own involvement. The understanding that the basis upon which so many of us identify with others is political, social, and ethical comes could and should be logically extended to creatures who, while not of our species, still share with us the capacity for suffering.

However, if this understanding was true the ethical basis of animal liberation - an empathy based upon assumed function of a central nervous system - then surely it contains within it some notion of priority, some assumed hierarchy of suffering to which the activism must pay heed. To swat a fly is less heinous, say, than torturing a human being and there must be infinite gradations between. The loss of this perspective appears to be one of the first signs that the animal liberationists had lost their way. The quote from an ALF spokesperson which heads Abe's article: "I wouldn't be at all concerned if a vivisector was killed, compared with the deaths and suffering they cause to millions of animals." Clearly makes nonsense of the ethical premises outlined above and stands in marked contrast with the earlier denunciations of action in the cause of animal liberation which were designed to cause harm to human beings, from the ubiquitous Ronnie Lee, spokesman for the Animal Liberation Front: "We would not be in favour of any incident where someone was hurt."

The events which prompted both opinions were the actions of the Animal Rights Militia on even more shadowy group than the ALF, who took it upon themselves to launch attacks, usually in the form of cruelly-prepared letter bombs, on people who saw as illegitimate political targets in the struggle to "liberate" animals. The ARM emerged at two significant points in the recent history of the animal liberation movement: first, in 1985, when the media were first given full vent to reports on animal militancy, by a series of letter bombs to the House of Commons; and secondly, after a period of media disinterest in the subject in 1995. All ARM actions that have been
reported were aimed at individual human beings, never at rescuing animals themselves.

The sudden media appearance of the ARA coincided with reports that things were now no longer as liberal as before. Attacks on police stations, the formation of the Animal Rights Group, and the growing demand for underground publications all contributed to a growing awareness. The success of the movement was due to the growing reaction against these attacks, which showed the need for a new approach. The emphasis on direct action, which some saw as a reaction against the authorities' use of violence, was seen as a way to counteract the growing threat. The movement, however, has also been criticized for its use of violence and for its lack of a clear political agenda. This has led to a growing number of attacks on the movement, which some see as a reaction against the authorities' use of violence.
Murray Bookchin in almost the only person writing in English and in the Anarchist tradition who has essayed a critique specifically of our times and has attempted to evolve a strategy to bring about revolutionary change. Whereas the critique has remained fairly consistent, rooting itself in ecological thought and proclaiming the obsolescence of the working class as an revolutionary subject, Bookchin’s strategy of opposition has gradually shifted over the years. Most recently he has advocated a strategy to which he’s given the name Libertarian Municipalism.

In the sixties Bookchin expounded the idea that there was a link between growing disruption and imbalance in the natural world and social imbalance and disruption. Each age throws up a science which is potentially liberatory, and in this age it is Ecology. Just as the maintenance of a viable ecosystem depends on diversity rather than uniformity, spontaneous development rather than inflexibility, and a balanced interdependence rather than linear hierarchy, the flourishing of a system fit for human beings depends on these same characteristics. Capitalism disrupts human community, a disruption whose effect in the disruption of natural communities. In biological terms, humanity is now a parasite.

The politics which can bring this state of affairs is the politics of what Bookchin calls Social Ecology. The principles of ecology become the paradigm for social organization; such a politics will therefore emphasise the ecological virtues of decentralisation, diversity, mutuality, spontaneity. Bookchin saw any revolutionary strategy as necessarily being consistent with these virtues. Movements displaying these would be aathema to Capitalism because they countered its most basic dynamics. To the Bookchin of this era spontaneity was the best way to resist Capital. The apparent breakdown in social discipline evinced by such developments as the new sexual freedom of the Sixties, the experiments in lifestyle, the worldwide eruption of an insurrectionary youth, was a positive counterblow to Capitalism. It was the spontaneity of this rebellion, rather than in the organised resistance of the working class, that the best hope for revolution lay. With the benefit of hindsight none of Bookchin’s claims looked a little sour, but he was not alone in his optimism at the time.

"The growing refusal runs very deep... in its denunciation of middle-class values it rapidly evolves into a rejection of the commodity system... In short, it tends to transcend every particularistic critique of the society and evolve into a generalised opposition to the bourgeois order on an ever-broadening scale" From Karl Marx’s “Dialectics of Nature” 1985

The way in which this snowballing movement would overthrow Capitalism would be classlessly spontaneous - the action of the mob would bring the whole edifice crashing down. Rioting in the streets was the revolutionary road per excellence.

"Crowd actions involve the rediscovery of the streets and the effort to liberate them. Ultimately it is in the streets that
power must be dismantled; for the streets, where daily life is endured, softened and eroded, and where power is confronted and sought, must be turned into the domain where daily life is enjoyed, created and nourished." "Praxis" March 1985

It is to Buchanan’s credit that, in evolving his views, he has recognised the failures of the intervening years. The fact that a rebellion in terms of values and attitudes did not develop into the generalised opposition he predicted in a sign of his underestimation of the adaptability of Capitalism, with its goat-like ability to rapidly digest all sorts of supposedly unpalatable diets. Buchanan’s alternative is to strengthen those features of civil society which are antithetical to Capitalist’s total domination. He looks to the possibility of bolstering what remains of the libertarians in everyday life, and to this end has begun advocating municipalism, i.e. participation in electoral politics at the local level only.

In some ways this seems to be a council of desperation, a last ditch stand at preserving a focus for a counter-ethic to the prevailing manifestation. Buchanan claims that his advocacy of municipalism is not new, but certainly the emphasis which he now places on it represents a distinct shift and is associated with his more pessimistic assessment of the depths of Capitalist’s invasion of everyday life.

The examples which Buchanan offers of the possibilities afforded by municipalism are mostly drawn from American traditions of local government and are rooted in the traditional mistrust of the central state found there. He is fond of citing the New Harmony Town Meeting as the highest form of social organisation along, it should be said, with the Greek polis as an enthusiasm shared by Buchanan (Arnott and Curren, Castoriadis). Closer to home, he is enthusiastic about the work of the German Green (which is rather than reality, libertarian Municipalism in an attempt to form a backbone against this, one which will act as a brak-
professionals parasitical on the collapse of a true local collectivity.

And how can we ensure that involvement in local politics will remain separate from national politics? The distinction between the activities of the Grasses at the local and national levels seems a bit contrived. The first step taken, the temptation of realpolitik will always prove strong to some - the chimera of 'real' change, "real" power. As it is sucked into the mists, the movement is weakened and ends up being used to bolster that which it set out to destroy.

The relation of local and national politics is inevitable where the local may have less immediacy than the national. Just as Bookchin at one time underestimated the ability of the Capitalist system to recuperate "oppositional" values, he may be underestimating the extent to which the very core of the local has already been destroyed.

One the one hand, the physical structure of many city areas makes community difficult if not impossible. Lacking public space, isolated, the areas where city trade, entertainment, etc., are located, the enclosed areas where many live are grim dormitories whose very streets make a mockery of the more comfortable connotations of words such as community. To control such an area would be to lord it over a dungeon.

At the same time, Mass Culture pushes national and transnational figures, real and imaginary, into our lives, to the extent that they become almost as familiar and as immediate as our neighbours. In the places where people still come together (bus stops, pubs, schools, workplaces), does this new common language of celebrity may even preclude organized speech about the real struggles of known people.

This tendency is at its most pronounced in the political arena. National figures are far better known than local ones. Everyone knows Thatcher but who can tell you the name of their local councillor?

The question must be asked in there still a place for a libertarian Municipalism? Is the power of the Grasses at the local level the outcome of genuine local concern or a consequence of their national fame? From here, Libertarian Municipalism looks like an attempt to piece together the scattered shards of something well and truly blown away.

And this links up with another issue in Bookchin's politics - which I have hinted at unstated in the analysis of a revolutionary subject. The complicity of the traditional proletariat to the destruction of history paves the way for Bookchin's prioritisation of an ethic, the ecological ethic, as the motive force towards revolution. Yet paradoxically, this particular attempt to replace the materialist mode of revolutionary change with an ethical one, effectively tears the moral heart out of the communist movement via the sundering of moral solidarity with and between the wretched of the earth.

It might have been easy, particularly in the Sixties, to feel that the two-car American working class were not exactly the wretched of the earth. The wretched still exist and the emasculation of the dispossessed has a greater force as a moral motivation than the need for diversity, belief in human-scale community or the principle of spontaneity.

It is in the wasted neighbourhoods of our cities that the marginalised and imprisoned will re-emerge to resist precisely what happens there.

Bookchin is right in seeing the business of revolutionaries as being the creation of community. But this is not the same as revivification of the local, which - as we know it - is in itself a creation of Capital.
Eco-Politics

Recently the Frankfurter Rundschau (equivalent to The Guardian) published the following result of a Public Opinion Survey:

80% of all Germans in the Federal Republic like to regularly go walking.

This is best translated as a composite of biking with backpacks and/or simply strolling through the fields and forests of Middle Europe.

This report is intriguing on three counts: firstly, it shows that even so-called "quality" newspapers sometimes reprint primary sources without a word of analysis; secondly, it shows that the organizers of questionnaires sometimes glibly regurgitate whatever rubbish their respondents come up with; and thirdly such polls reveal that the respondents themselves will often give an answer they think they should, rather than an answer that is objectively more-or-less correct.

Think about it: 80% of all West Germans regularly go rambling... in effect, since the remaining 20% of the population is either too young or too infirm, this would mean that virtually the entire nation is frequently (let's say at the weekends) to be found roaming through the pine forests. Well as someone who really does penetrate the German forests on her mountain bike, I can tell you that the number of Germanburgers following in my tracks (whatever they claim to the polls) is approximately zero.

What's this anecdote got to do with DDE Orders in West Germany, you may be asking yourself?

Provisional reply: there's an enormous element of greenery here, imaginary and real, which does not solely the consequence of political green consciousness, but possibly its predicate. For example, since I started living in the FRG a few years ago, recycled containers for old paper, glass, batteries, metal cans and even plastic bottles have, yes, mushroomed on street-corners everywhere. A rubbish exchange set up in 1973 by the Bavarian Chamber of Commerce (demonstrative!) is still flourishing. In any West German supermarket you can obtain toilet paper made of recycled paper, non-phosphate detergents, wholefood products, etc. And - no big deal but instructive nevertheless - all petrol stations offer non-leaded petrol and the even more popular diesel (this because diesel-powered vehicles are exempt from Road Tax on the grounds that their emissions do not affect trees - however it has recently been established that diesel fumes might well be carcinogenic for animals and humans).

West German media give relentless coverage to green themes; Chernobyl still being in the news, as are also the rectorate at Chattenburg, Breidbach, Vockersdorf and Exeber. Similarly highlighted are the topics of:

- Chemical additives in food and drink;
- Municipal measures, although halfhearted, to combat the tyranny of the car;
- Save our forest campaigns;
- Activities of ecological groups such as Greenpeace and Robin Wood;
- Vehicular Neck-Against-Hokus-Pokus concerts;
- The Peace Movement;
- Police heavy-handedness / incompetence at demos;

and at the moment in particular, the disgusting state of the
Rivers Elaine, Rowel and Sar. Incidentally, in the finestest of the 5 million fish killed by illegal dumping of cyanide in the Sar has already been sold to cosmetics manufacturers.

Of course, media featuring does not necessarily have any affect. That’s not quite my point, which is repeating myself, that there’s a huge amount of Greenness in West Germany — including Right-wing Greenness. At one pseudo-romantic Street Festival in a small town on 20,000 citizens, I observed 6 Green stands, of which only 2 were identifiable as "Left" — Die Grünen and Grupenovace.

Where then does this greenness come from? And why mainly in West Germany? After all, France also belongs to that gigantic sprawl of Middle Europe which consists of agriculture, mountains and forests scattered occasionally with villages and now cities, but the French don’t reveal much of a Green awareness, so it can’t merely spring from the geography of imposition. Perhaps German Greenness is due delayed aftermath of the postwar devastation and deprivation experienced by the present 40-plus generation whose first childhood years will have been a sort of existential waste not least not less. Or perhaps, as Murray Bookchin has pointed out elsewhere, this greenness does partly have its intellectual antecedents in 19th century Romantic literature, which was also influential in the founding in 1968 five years before the British Boy Scouts of the Van der Vugt movement, whose members earnestly biked through the forests singing folk-songs and considering themselves slightly-rebels and not bourgeois. Indeed the success of the Van der Vugt was due to the fact in 1975 the German SPD set up a leftist version (the Falken), and their present members can still be spotted at most demo in their quaint blue shirts, red backpacks and brooches.

And just where do the Party-political Die Grünen come from? To get the answer to this inquiry, I want to tell their EQ in Bonn my naively thinking that they’d be only too pleased to fill-in the details. Far from it! I was given a pleasant-enough welcome, but then foiled off with a one-sheer skeleton history of Die Grünen which started in 1979 and the vague but mysterious group that an official handbook would be appearing in the next few years. Frustrated, I asked in a Marxist bookshop in Bonn if they could provide me with a short account of Die Grünen. I was treated to a monologue on how — from a Marxist perspective — a satirical history of Die Grünen would never be published, because their celebrities were ashamed of the conservative background to Die Grünen. Even more intriguing, I then began to put questions in a Bonn community bookshop, and was provided with roughly the same standpoint, namely that Die Grünen in the future are not especially interested in having published how the "Left" Grüne forced out the "Right" Grüne — often in very trying and personality-based circumstances.

Whatever, the Authorised Version of the history of Die Grünen in its one-page length in this in 1979 various pseudo-left groups (socialists, disillusioned communists and Marxists, ecologists and environmentalists) fanned together to form Die Grünen — a vocation which ignores conservative representation and the uncomfortable but true fact that the first parliamentary green grouping was a conservative one in the state of Schleswig-Holstein in 1975.

You can argue, I suppose, that where Die Grünen emerged from is irrelevant: today they can be safely placed somewhere incontrovertibly "Left" in the political spectrum. Indeed, many anarchists would have little difficulty identifying with various contents of the manifesto of Die Grünen: no racism, no sexism, no violence, no power, no growth, no alienation, no democracy, no redistribution of wealth, etc.

All the same, there are problems, not least the corrosive question of parliamentary, representative democracy. Does the Left Team think that an elected parliament with a Green majority is capable of deconstructing itself? Is it sensible to mention this issue that Die Grünen are split bitterly into two all-consuming camps: the Fundis and the Realists. Article 2 of the Introduction to Die Grünen’s Constitution says: Die Grünen acknowledge that to bring about any overdue change it is necessary to mobilise all the ecological and democratic forces from both the parliaments and the extra-parliamentary walks of life.

The Fundis therefore demand that Die Grünen fundamentally steer clear of the established parties and concentrate on the extra-parliamentary bit of their constitution, while the Realists (current in the ascendant) insist that “realistic” cooperation with the SPD and, even the CDU, isn’t a sell-out as long as green objectives are tangibly achieved in the process. In other words, the Realists within Die Grünen place their emphasis on the parliaments’ bit of the constitution. Thus it is easy to see why thinkers like Murray Bookchin are basically on the side of the Fundis, who seem to be saying, should not be adverse to cooperating with other parties at the local, municipal or communal level, as well as preserving their extra-parliamentary purity. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, on the other hand, is an eminent Realist. Remember him? Well-known shop-jockey and publised on the Frankfurt magazine Flasher and published in the American anarcho-socialist, but best rendered in this context as time cut.

Although it is unfair to pick on personalities (of course!) Cohn-Bendit is a classic illustration of where the Realist wing of Die Grünen could lead: hip radic-a-lisms, left charismatic and vote-catcher for the SPD, ginner-group status, Green politics as consumer goods, parliamentary light-relief, and eventually insufficiency. However, in the unwieldy of Social Revolution, taking place in Europe tomorrow, anarchists should perhaps refrain from smiling disdainfully at the Cohn-Bendits on the scene and get on with there to counter-balance them. In addition, the Fundis have surprisingly little criticism of the state and employment of repressive entities, but would in my opinion be honestly open to any dialogue on such matters. We warned nevertheless: Die Grünen are very proficient at holding incredibly long debates.

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To understand the connection one must remember that there has been a committed and continuous anti-nuclear presence in West Germany for almost 20 years. Thus the effects of Chernobyl were felt on the sweet and sour (and often blood and tears) of hundreds of militants. In France, for example, where such a movement hardly existed, the political effects were thus considerably different.

One part of this movement is Die Grünen, originally formed as a parliamentary "umbrella" for extra-parliamentary activities. Due to the electoral success of Die Grünen (eg Hessen 12%, Hamburg 15%, Tübingen 20.6% beating the SPD), some members believe they can collaborate with the government at a parliamentary level.

This has led to catastrophic policy-making. For example, a compromise by Die Grünen has led to the building of a new prison in Hamburg: the water-cannon which killed a demonstrator in Frankfurt was bought with the explicit allowance of Die Grünen; the briny tax of exhaust gas levies for cars instead of progressively tax on engine size has badly affected basic support for Die Grünen, who are exactly those people who drive clapped-out cars, etc.

In the national parliament, the PDP, with 5-6% of the vote, holds important posts such as Treasurer, while Die Grünen, with 7-10%, hold nothing. Thus, so far this parliamentarism has been an absolute failure. For Die Grünen's successors, they have a new post of Environmental Minister in Hessen, but this is a post without teeth, mostly to do with land conservation, and not particularly important. Useful however as a figurehead, and Fischer used this position to bring in limits for radioactivity in milk (60 Bq per litre) which were realistic (ie the same as in Sweden), in contrast to the council government-defined limit of 500 Bq per litre.

When the radioactive cloud from Chernobyl hit West Germany the reaction of government politicians ranged from nothing happening, it's all OK to it's terrible. Those wicked Russians, often changing the same day. It was so contradictory that even opinion polls reported that 90% of the population had ceased to believe what the government said. (Kohl said it was a Marxist plot).

Citizens flocked to the only public institutions open to them, the universities, with samples of grass, water, etc., everything imaginable, to measure the radioactive contamination. Technical staff and students organised independently of the professors and made the measurements; they were mostly shocked with the levels they found. The university directors clamped down as soon as they could, stopping measurements and banning the results from being collected or compared and published.

Measurements continued secretly and the results leaked out through staff who were sympathisers with the anti-nuclear movement, through GBA/CEF, Die Grünen and PAV. It was these people, especially GBA, who reproduced the local data with that from other towns in special issues of their various papers.
and distributed them from house to house in print runs often of hundreds of thousands. This information exchange, often as good as the official channels, was made possible through the network of hardened militants, forged through 20 years of experience, action and hard work.

The effect of this propaganda was not great, but it was an immediate boost to the nuclear movement. The CDU and other groups were brought back into line the next day by CSU leader Strauss, who really gave the impression of running around pulling strings in the founding chair. The CSU/GNU reaffirmed that they were committed to continued nuclear expansion but had to take up a scheme which would let off internal pressure in the party and lead the CDU credibility in the elections. The SPD, which was only a week away, had a National for the Environment! Good idea: Fischer in Hessen in at least reasonably popular and the CDU look at least a bit concerned. A CDU year-man, Vollman, was brought in for the part. He was extreme-right mayor of Frankfurt, where he destroyed large parts of the city to make room for multinational companies with tax relief. In the winter demonstrations in Frankfurt last year he stated that police would have the right to shoot merely demonstrators. He won, of course, and the SPD lost in the elections.

The SPD, after the victory of the Brandt government, moved towards a more moderate stance on nuclear matters which had been denied to Fischer. The SPD altered their platform with respect to nuclear power and are now for getting out of the nuclear power by 1995. This announcement came in time for them to get an extra 6% of the vote from the CSU/GNU in the Saxony elections. Will Brandt said we have learnt from the Greeks.

So what was the net effect of Chernobyl? The revolution was nowhere in sight, although ordinary people were really pissed-off with the government's lies and in this respect had their eyes opened. The CSU/GNU was shaken and now visibly lost support. Die Grunes came out of Chernobyl losing flat-footed, totally ineffective, not-meaningless in the party political arena and cut-off from their grassroots beginnings. The Communist Party, after a peace to seek directions from the Central Committee, aligned itself as usual with the line from East Germany and Moscow, declaring itself rattled in its past stand for nuclear power, thus moving a little closer to the twilight of extinction.

The SPD has profited electorally from Chernobyl by making a significant step in the direction of de-nuclearisation. Considering that the SPD will win a majority in the national Parliament in the near future, this can be called a significant step towards realizing the limited demands of the anti-nuclear movement. Where does this limited success come from?

But in any great moment from Die Grunes themselves, from whom the SPD has learnt to govern a little better. It comes mostly from the extra-parliamentary movement from the contacts between public service workers and the anti-nuclear movement first, but mainly due to the ability of the network of autonomous groups to act together quickly and precisely, to organise at local and national level almost overnight, and to possess a propaganda apparatus which can reach the majority of the population independently of official channels.

This was helped by their lack of central, swampy directives, a well-thought-out position, born of years of cooperation and their ability to take their own informed initiatives. In other lands, without this kind of movement, or where it is less developed, the State and Capital retained their equilibrium much better. The anti-nuclear movement here is, however, not only against nuclear power and weapons, but it is highly class-conscious and is developing perspectives not only of alternative energy but of alternative society. It will take time and more blood, more sweat, more tears, more money, but we will hear from them again.

A Member of EFA

NOTES:
1. Green Party
2. Social Democratic Party
3. Free Democrats (Liberal)
5. CSU/GNU Prime Minister
6. Green Rainbow, Alternative is student movement
7. Marxo-socialists.

Cont'd. from p.4.

minded "ethic" of quid-pro-quo which is the bedrock of commodity society. It follows that it is to the active defence of such relations that radicals should look.

Although it is obvious that the weight of accumulated wealth and power still have their effect on society, popular capitalism exposes the concepts upon which these ideologies have built themselves. As more and more are given the opportunity to experience the capitalist condition, more and more are likely to fall for the illusions of "ideals" by which it functions. These include exactly the narrow materialist view which aren't mentioned in the quotation introducing this article, a view of humanity trapped in the basality of survival, and one which considers individuals as mere statistics in the arithmetic of the market.

Policy makers are increasingly being asked to consider the effects of policy solely in terms of its economic consequences, regardless of the violation of common sense or the quality of life. The tallies of the human struggle has to be shifted. For us in the West, it is less and less about the division of the apples of production and more and more about the existence of the "division" and the "apples of." Put simply, we are further immersed in the logic of equivalence, we have to decide whether this is the "quality" of life we want. It is around such decisions that the radical voice must be heard, a radical voice.

The Pleasure Tendency
reviews

"Soviet Peasantry" or "The Peasants' Art of Starving" by "Lev Timoshenko." Published by Telos Press, New York at $15. A translation of a samizdat study of the fate of the peasantry under the Soviet regime. The author considers the entire power of the Soviet state to rest upon the exploitation of the peasantry. While Victor Zaslavsky's introduction to the translation goes some way to limit this monolithic view, the author's thesis can be seen as an attempt to persuade Soviet city-dwellers that their common belief that peasants are all rich good-for-nothings is wrong.

Similar problems arise when people in the West see the "private enterprise" of the private plots as a good thing (or bad for those attached to Stalin), failing to see the super-exploitation inherent in that system.

LETAH: Libertarian Review on the Countries of the East (LCP) from B.P. 141-39, 75432 Paris Cedex 9, France. A fascinating quarterly magazine covering opposition and oppositional movements, in both workplace and culture.

"Socialist" countries (including Algeria and Cuba). Recent issues have included a country by country examination of the influence of revolutionary Surrealism in pre-war "Eastern" Europe, adding greater emphasis to Milan Kundera's point that these countries should be considered as Central Europe.

LA BANQUISE no.4 (40F from BP)

The 1984 Polish film Dignity, observed recently at the Edinburgh Film Festival, provided an interesting footnote to the articles on Poland in June & Nov no.3.

Set in the months preceding the declaration of martial law in December 1981, the film tells of one brave worker's stand for reason and democracy against the Solidarnosc tyranny in his factory. He and his Party-member roommates are almost the only workers left in the old official factory trade union who is prepared to stand up and be counted against the "impermeable" social and economic demands being made by Solidarnosc. Depicted are consisting of honest workers misled by an impenetrable, expensively-dressed official (a Korn clown), whose oratory continually pushes them further from the path of reason.

Even our hero's family is not unaffected by the turmoil in the country: the younger members of the three generations in their flat have taken to answering back their "socialist" comrades (including Algerians and Cubans). Recent issues have included a country by country examination of the influence of revolutionary Surrealism in pre-war "Eastern" Europe, adding greater emphasis to Milan Kundera's point that these countries should be considered as Central Europe.

LA BANQUISE no.4 (40F from BP)

The film-maker previously worked in newsreel and documentaries; presumably he felt that fantasy would make a change (while the makers of other recent Polish films, such as J. Mousty, have managed to deal obliquely with social problems). Obviously the moral of the tale is to demonstrate the failure of all pre-December institutions (party, management, and official unions) and justify the only possible resolution of the situation a military takeover. The fantasy is underplayed by attempts to reality the sense of crisis, economic hardship, housing shortage, Party fat-cats, etc. are all on display. However, the military and police are almost from view; instead, the only coercive power is Solidarnosc.

It would be interesting to know how the film was received in Poland, where the events whose history was being rewritten are still fresh in people's minds. The film was described as "showing the other side of the Solidarnosc coin." Unfortunately the coin did not ring true.

A. D.
Recently a steady flow of translations of texts by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard have appeared in English, particularly in "radical" arts magazines. However there seems to have been few attempts to come to terms with the content of his writings and the trajectory, validity and implications of his political themes.

As Henri Lefebvre's teaching assistant at Montréal in the late-50s, Baudrillard was involved in the attempt to develop a "critique of everyday life" more responsive to contemporary developments than traditional Marxism. According to one account, other participants included Guy Debord, Reinald Vaëzegm and Désiré Coït-Benoit. Whatever the circumstances, the disputes over authorship of ideas developed in this area, there was an overlapping emphasis on questions of urbanisation, leisure and tourism and on the importance of the critique of the nature of the commodity.

The others named were much more prominent in the period leading up to 1968 during the May-June 1968 events, when the critique of everyday life ceased to have burst onto the streets. Nowadays, Coït-Benoit is deeply involved in the area around the Grève ('the rebound from his love-affair with the Revolution'), and Debord and Vaëzegm have lapsed into silence, occasionally asserting their own uncompromising radicality. On the one side, a pessimism in the "practical"; on the other, little contact with the world today: an unfilled councilist project simply remains on the agenda, a missed appointment with History.

By contrast, Baudrillard comes to prominence only with the attempt to understand the reflex of that movement. As he says "that indescribable situation, unsayable in its breadth, but new and radical, has not ended, nor have the ravages caused by its destruction of certain fundamental concepts."

Le Système des Objets (published in 1968) investigated the way in which technological "improvement" removed all trace of human symbolic relations from objects leaving a system of consumption without finality, haunted by the robot and the gadget - respectively the final victory and failure of the totally functional.

However, consumption was not represented as just a clogged-up outpipe of the production system. Consumption is the "activity of systematic manipulation of signs", a "designed and limitless project, adopted in the absence of any other. Objects/signs in their identity equate with one another and can multiply to infinity; they must do so to supplement an absent reality at each moment. It's finally because consumption is based on fact that it's irresistible". The contemporary consumer's "individuality" is induced by advertising (which constantly refers to nature), appearing as "the most democratic product", consistently soliciting our needs and desires, even while recalling "the intolerable situation of parental gratification".

Le Système de Consumption and the articles collected in For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (1970 & 1972) are more explicitly aligned with a radical project:

- Socialists' assumptions regarding the "real" material base being put into question; it is linked to the sign constituted in the Lacanian Mirror Stage: an imaginary order of terms like production, labour and value through which society will recognise itself. So terms like "true value", accepted by Marx as a relatively unproblematic finality of the production system, were to be seen only as the shift of political economy.

- Drawing on revisionist anthropologists of "pristine" societies (e.g. Marshall Sahlins and Pierre Clastres) Baudrillard introduced the notion of symbolic exchange, firstly to show surplus value as meaningless in relation to exchange in "primitive" societies, and secondly as a privileged term to be counterposed to the entire history of the "political economy of the sign".

This concept of Symbolic Exchange is used to highlight the satire in attempts to turn mass media to "socialist" ends: "it is not as vehicles of combat, but in their form and very operation that media induce a social relation". This operation is that of "speech without response", without reciprocity. Against (or beyond) Orwell it is said of TV that "There is no need to imagine it as a state periscope spying on everyone's private life - the
situation as it stands is more efficient than that: it is the certainty that people are no longer speaking to each other”.

Suggestion of talk of “essences”, discovered even in Pop art (and assumptions about what such an “essentialist” project), was leading to an acceptance by which transcendence which socialists would supposedly realize.

The Mirror of Production (1975) concentrates on the effect of these criticisms on the radical project:

“A radical questioning of the concept of production begins at the level of words and products. But this critique attains its full scope in its extension to that other commodity, labour power. It is the concept of production, then, which is subjected to a radical critique” (p.23).

The one appears to be Bauchillard’s quite conservative and radical book conservative in its utilization of Marxian terminology, reference to values; radical is the close scrutiny of their relevance and limitations. Finding in them a political discourse based on uncritically accepted references seen in the Mirror of Production. Contradictions emerging within a system do not imply any possibility for a break with that system: no revolt can be expected from any group of workers as long as they accept that identity imposed upon them; only “subversion” plays with the excess over pure function.

But curiously, this greater “realism” about the constrictions of the code ends with the then-obligatory recognition of women, blacks, gays and youth as the carriers of a genuine revolt against the code. Incorporation of these seemingly “subversive” demands now seem to have been largely successful, through the creation of segmented markets within which “identity” can be represented and purchased.

L’Echange Symbolique et la Mort (1976) carries out a more detailed examination of the symbolic, the only possible term emerging from the previous books. Freud’s concept of the Death Drive is placed in conjunction with Marx’s observation that Capitalism is founded on the exploitation of Dead Labour over Living Labour: “This possibility of qualitative equivalence... of wage and labour power assumed the worker’s death, and that between commodities assumes the symbolic externalization of objects. Death always makes possible calculation of equivalence and regulation by indifference. This isn’t violent and physical death, it’s the ... respective neutralization of life and death in survival, or deferred death”.

This book also returns to the question/response duality of the system (which has been mentioned in La Société de Consommation) as the basis of the participation elicited by the system. Public Opinion Polio, etc. are an enormous simulation of public space, and the ever-increasing reliance upon them indicates the hyper-reality of the system: people are sealed not to form opinions, but to reproduce those already framed. Constant appeals to “the social” and “the community” by agencies and political groups are merely avowals of a presence-through-abSENCE. The economy becomes hyper-real, with the constant reference to crime hiding the losses of any objective standard, whether Gold or Dollar. This last example related to a post-1971 and this Dollar Standard and 1970’s dissipation, but also mentioned the Eurocrad market, all the more relevant today, when currency dealing is seen as an extremely profitable area with no finality or discernable surplus value creation.

Although the order of production and its supposed contradictions were no longer privileged, there remained reliance on the “subversion of the code” by subgroups who practise “refusal” and reject representation within the ruling code. With the dissipation of such activity, what remains? "...believed in a possible subversion of the code of the petty bourgeoisie and in the possibility of an alternate exchange and a radical reciprocity of symbolic exchange. Today all that has changed.”

From In the Shadow of the Silent Majority (1975) onward, symbolic exchange is linked to Bauchillard’s analyses by a new positive term, the “masse”, the absolute negation of meaning. The “masse” always rejected any accreditation for example, in religion it preferred “the inaccessibility of ritual... to the transcendence of the idea” “For the masses, the Kingdom of God has always been already here on Earth, in the pagan inaccessibility of images.” The masses’ acceptance of power’s speech without response and their lack of overt subversion is rotated into a tactical refusal of meaning.

Always suspicious of theories of alienation, with their privileging of supposed transcendental values: Bauchillard happily negate all such assumptions, saying of the masses that: “They are given meanings: they want spectacle.” and that “the desire for a show... is a spontaneous, total resistance to the ultimatum of historical and political reason.” Alienation “has probably never been anything but a philosopher’s ideal perspective for the use of hypothetical masses. It has probably never expressed anything but the alienation of the philosopher himself - in other words, he who thinks himself other.” The lettuce explain the user-consumption in demonstrations etc. by mumbling about alienation and false consciousness, which amounts to a slander against almost everyone. Bauchillard suggests that the “mass strategy” is far in advance of that of the leftists, who are incapable of moving beyond outdated positions based on the age of production.

With the loss of a positive carrier of subversion, he seems to draw attention to the hyper-reality of his own position as, in a strange prose-style based on antirhetorical analysis (black holes, red shifts, etc.), he develops and exaggerates the idea of opacity as a form of resistance practiced by the “masse” to all meanings which politicians at all descriptions would impose upon us. The “masse” becomes that “the only term which can describe those who reject meaning and participation: a black hole into which politicians shine light but which
This mass strategy is presented as switching between hyper-confrontation and demand for subjection. It is likened to the child's strategy in relation to the parent's demands: children's behavior when told to "act your age" and wanting to be treated as an individual subject when treated like an infant. Opposition becomes just an effect.

In rejecting all imposed meaning in favor of an eternal polyvalence, Baudrillard accepts the label of "nihilist". "If being nihilist is to be obsessed with the mode of disappearance and no longer with the mode of production, then I am a nihilist... Theoretical violence, not truth, is the sole expedient remaining to me. But this is a stopgap. For it would be admirable to be a nihilist, if radicality still existed." The evaporation of meaning and the system's own nihilism sweep everything in indifference and leave all activities deadened, without echo.

In recent essays on French politics over the past 10 years, Baudrillard rightly emphasizes that the Socialist Party's 1981 electoral victory was far from their traditional expectations: no popular movement brought the Left to power, merely an electoral simulation. "Seeing their having gained power as deserved recompense and the logical outcome of historical development, they failed to see that they occupied a space left empty by the reflux of historic and political passions." Their fundamental misunderstanding about the basis of their power haunted their whole experience of power: they saw how ex-Premier Laurent Fabius could be so confused about the perverse mechanisms of popular indifference, depoliticizing spa... and resistance, the absence of collective myth, etc. in spite of the fact that he is in power precisely thanks to this indifference.

The ghost of gauchisme lingers, in the stress still laid on mass movements as the source of legitimacy, but with an insufficiency that no such movement is now possible. Only simulation remains. And the politicians' major error seems to be this: their repeated analysis of political virtue in ignorance of this fact. Baudrillard's insistence on this "dead side" in politics leaves his articles reading like a letter-day rewrite of The Prince.

Baudrillard states that "...I do not have relations with the intellectuals, I am not totally integrated in its networks, cliques and rotte..." But from here this seems a surprising statement. The extent to which he is indeed outside the French intelligentsia is that he rejects their traditional role, as much because it's historically outdated as anything else: "...it's not enough to ask (the intellectual) to be a critical conscience or moral guardian of his time - that required an appropriate passion: for Gide it was integrity, for Sartre, lucidity; for the Situationists and others, radicality. After that, it's over: no more political-intellectual virtue. After that, there's irony, the fascination of a world dominated by chance processes, by microscop... sequences of events - transhistory, an
curious as a minefield to cruse..."

Whatever the extent to which this does describe a situation and the crisis perceived by that class, one role seems to remain: that of intellectual burden consisting on the mode of disappearance - and Baudrillard's recent writing seems designed to fill that role.

It would be pleasant to reject Baudrillard's writings as a Cassandra's invention invented by someone dragging himself "between the television set and the writing desk". It would be a particular relief if such a real movement could be hauled up to show it as redundant. Baudrillard's writings can be utilized to show how erroneous is the current pragmatic radicalism which seeks to take refuge in the halls of representation to defend "our" gauchisme during a period of refusals. A politics based on opposition to representation itself has no place there.

As for Baudrillard's own outlook, though, despite displayed more fanaticism than others in trying to understand recent developments rather than just insisting that things are really going their way, and despite devoting much energy to why the mass at the expense of the personal, the problem, the diapason of any real movement.

A.D.

NOTES:

1. The obvious exceptions to this are the invocations to the law that replaces (the Mirror of Production and For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign) and the attempts in Seduced and Abandoned: The Baudrillard Scene (Gnomon Press).

2. L'Estafette and Politics by Michel Barzun

3. In the collection In gunasse Mgr. le Comteur (Ed. Delamere) reveals in a role as master-strategist, boasting of having avoided recuperation into the role of radical media pundit.

4. La Sauve Divine, p.187

5. Le Système des Oubli, p.217

6. Le Système des Oubli, p.253

7. Le Système des Oubli, p.240

8. A specter haunts the revolutionary imagination: the phantasm of production. Everywhere it sustains an unbridled remnant of productivity."

9. (Preface to The Mirror of Production).

10. This and previous quotation from For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign p.158, p.172.

11. L'enchanteur, p.74.


15. This and previous quotation from The Masses; The illusion of the Social in the Media.

16. From Sur le nihilisme, cited in Paul Foss's Découvrir l'âge d'or dans les écoles et Gramsci.

17. La Sauve Divine, p.87

18. La Sauve Divine, p.87

19. La Sauve Divine, pp.131, 1311.
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